













# TYPES OF WOMANHOOD.

## IN FOUR STORIES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EVELYN," "SISTER ANNE," ETC.

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STORY THE FIRST . . . . OUR WISH  
STORY THE SECOND . . . . FOUR SISTERS.  
STORY THE THIRD . . . . BERTHA'S LOVE.  
STORY THE FOURTH . . . . AN ORDEAL.

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# TYPES OF WOMANHOOD.

## OUR WISH

Below us, the dark gulf, for ever deep,  
Above us, through the dark, a light of day,  
And thou wert as a jewel on my breast,  
Sweet shining in the light that lit not me.

Byron



*there*—and where the twilight purples brought him before my eyes, the while that my heart ached for tidings of him, for the mere knowledge of where he was; and my whole spirit was moved within me, and called out in very helplessness of yearning:—

“O God! in some one of thy worlds, wilt thou not let me see his face again?”

Verily, Divine ways are beyond our ken, and the inequalities of human fate are mysterious to our finite vision. When, one day, our eyes shall be opened, and we see clearly, will not great pangs of remorse reach to our hearts as we stand before God, and looking back on the rebellious past, remember how often, in the presumption of misery, we have wronged His justice, and doubted His love? ●

Years have passed by since the convulsive sick pain of those few weeks after Grace's marriage, rent anew the spirit that was so fierce in its suffering, so weak, alas! in its resolves. What has been the history of those years, may be read, I think, in the fair record of the days that pass by *now*, quietly, so placidly. In tendance of my father, the old man, so happy in his simple pleasures, in his garden, or fishing in the stream; or rambling with the children through the woods and fields; and in teaching my Rosamond and Mary, and in learning from them, and in finding new interests among our poorer neighbours—truly, the time passes with no laggard step.

My two elder sisters remain abroad; both seem to be satisfied, each in her own way.

I hear often from Ellinor. They are still wandering. Sometimes they make a home for some months in some little-known nook in Italy, or France, or Germany; but more recently they have been travelling, so that sometimes I do not know their whereabouts for weeks together. But I know they are well, and brave, and content; and I know that they will one day return to see their old home. He has said that he will; and I have faithful trust that he will come before I die.

Eustace is growing a noted man now. He takes a busy and a leading part in this busy world. He and Grace have



# TYPES OF WOMANHOOD

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## OUR WISH.

### PART I.

I WAS past my first youth before I met Paula Clive, and she was no longer a girl. I well remember seeing her tall figure standing erect, with a sort of dignity that had a suspicion of haughtiness about it, under the central chandelier of Lady Craven's brilliant drawing-room. It was at one of her ladyship's *conversazioni*, or, as she preferred calling her weekly reunions, "festivals of lions." On this occasion I, precious in her dilettante eyes as a scientific lion, had been entreated, teased, and persuaded into coming, the most effectual persuasion, after all, lying in her passing announcement that—

"Miss Clive will be with me. Oh, I forgot—of course you never read those kind of things. But she is a most interesting person. I was fortunate enough to visit my cousins, Mr. and Mrs. Halliwell, in ———shire, this year, and Mr. Clive is curate of their parish. Singular, isn't it, for a clergyman's daughter to write such books? Now I assure you, if you'll only come," &c.

I consented, and was relieved of the hospitable lady's voluble attentions. She had wrongly concluded that I "never read those kind of books"—novels, to wit. I had been struck by an extract in a newspaper from one of Miss Clive's fictions, and had been led to read the whole of it, and also the one or two other books that bore her name. Their chief attraction to me was that they were real, and not.

romantic, and dealt more in facts than in sentiments. Under the veil of fiction I saw sufficiently evident a sort of passionate radicalism, social, moral, and religious—an impetuous disdain of orthodox shams—an eager, enthusiastic yearning after some truth, be it comely or ugly, under the heap of fair-seeming falsities with which modern life is incrustated. I saw all this, and it aroused in me a keen interest for the writer—a woman so unlike most other women—nay, of a mind whose depth and bravery must exceed, I thought, most men's. I was anxious to see her, and when, as I have said, I entered Lady Craven's saloon, I stood for some little time contemplating the tall lady under the chandelier, who was at once pointed out to me as "the authoress of that queer book."

She was handsome—her presence would have commanded attention even if she had not been celebrated beforehand. Her voice was peculiar, too; and I always had great faith in voices. I liked hers; it was no musical murmur, neither was it high-toned, nor sharply modulated; but it was clear, decided, tuneful, with a certain vibration in it like that of a firmly-smitten violin string.

Presently we were introduced. At the sound of my name I noticed that her cheek flushed faintly, and a spark seemed to quiver in her eye for an instant; and when, as she bent towards me, she said she "was glad to know Mr. Heber," for the first time in my life I took the words, of course, in a literal sense, and believed them. We conversed for a little while on passing topics—nothing more—and then both of us were compelled by our exigeante hostess to bestow our attention in other directions. But later in the evening we were able to resume our talk, and this time we plunged more into "the heart of things." I, at least, found it possible to see somewhat deeply into her mind; and I was not disappointed in what I discovered. It was a good, true, honest, fearless spirit, such as I honoured—such as I had long since been tempted to decide did not exist in the world. Inter-course with it was like breasting a strong wind with a saline aroma in its breath. It was healthful and cheering to inhale it. I took delight in the boldness and bravery of her spirit. I gloried in her freedom from conventional prejudice—her daring disregard of traditions and opinions. All those



slavish fetters that now-a-days trammel women's minds, pinching and curbing them to a like degree of weakness and helplessness, had been cast off by this one woman at least, I thought.

Yes, I was glad to know her. I could have laughed at myself for the internal reluctance with which I quitted Lady Craven's house that night; and when, a week afterwards, one of her ladyship's dainty billets invited me to a "select breakfast party—the very *crème de la crème* of literary and artistic London"—I was absolutely led to accept, shrewdly judging that, as Miss Clive was staying at her house, I should be sure to see her again on the occasion. I was disappointed. Properly enough, I sharply told myself, for having indulged in such vain foolery of anticipation. No; Miss Clive was not there. She had been summoned home the previous day to her father, who was ill.

"You know he is a clergyman," said Lady Craven, between sipping her chocolate and toying with the fragment of pâté lying on her plate, "and Puseyite to the last degree, I understand. An odd conjunction, isn't it, of High Churchism and those reforming, discontented-with-every-present-state-of-things novels of hers? And they are strongly attached to one another, I believe. She lost her mother years ago. And she is very good and active in the parish—visits the sick, helps the poor, and so forth; but never teaches in the schools, I'm told. In fact, with her writing and her hard studies (you know she reads Greek and Hebrew, and all sorts of out-of-the-way languages!), she cannot have much leisure. She is an extraordinary woman, certainly. I like her very much. So original: not the least like the hackneyed type of literary woman."

Some months passed on. I had not forgotten, for the impressions made on that portion of myself devoted to human interests were always far too few to be easily or speedily erased. Therefore one day, when I was looking over my note-book of engagements for the coming autumn, it was with a curious thrill that I recognised the name of the provincial town near which Miss Clive lived, as one of the places where I was to deliver a course of lectures.

And when, at the appointed time, I took my place on the

platform of the spacious Literary and Scientific Institute of that important manufacturing borough, I could not, or did not, choose to refrain from a searching gaze at my audience, to try and discover, amid that strange sea of unfamiliar faces, one face that I well remembered. I saw it. In one of the foremost ranks, seated beside Lady Craven's cousin, the lady of the manor, I saw again the pale, significant face lit with its wonderfully eloquent eyes. Those eyes! I saw them more than once when I was not looking at them. It seemed marvellously natural to see her again, like recalling the notes of some well-known tune. \* \* \*

Well, the lecture finished, I was draining a glass of water in the committee-room, when a message was brought to me from Mr. and Mrs. Halliwell. Would I kindly allow them a minute's interview? And presently I stood face to face with Miss Clive and this lady and gentleman, the latter of whom I already was slightly acquainted with. In brief, it resulted in my being invited to become a guest at the Manor House during my stay in the neighbourhood, and my acceptance of the proffered kindness.

And we all drove to the Manor House together; but there Miss Clive left us. She could not be longer away from her father, whose health, it seemed, was still precarious. That night when, after a dull interval of talk with my host and hostess, I was at length alone, I was somewhat puzzled at myself. What motives had induced me to become a guest in this house? I did not like the people nor the place particularly. Why and for what had I given up my independence at my inn? Why, and for what? Then I remembered, or thought I only then remembered, the plan for the next day—a visit to Gale Falls, twelve miles off—and we were to call for Miss Clive. She was to go with us.

The excursion to Gale Falls was one of many similar pleasures. Yes, they were pleasures. Excellent Miles Halliwell, I owed thee much! Even the pair of grey horses that drew our barouche have a place in my grateful remembrance. It was autumn weather, such as I never remember before—soft, shining, exquisitely, tremulously beautiful. The sunsets especially had a strange loveliness in them. They came nearer to me; I saw them more clearly, more vividly, both

with the eyes of the body and the eyes of the mind. Moreover, they always seemed to me to have some significance as regarded myself—I was going to say *ourselves*, for Miss Clive, it happened, generally saw them with me. If I had been a painter, and could have nailed those sunsets to a piece of canvas, as some one or two painters have done in the course of many centuries, I could, I think, go over glibly every smallest detail of that time by the mere looking at the pictured memoranda of those radiant half-hours. They seemed to condense into one drop of light the whole lustre of the bygone day.

We suited one another—Paula Clive and I. There are various kinds and degrees even in love. It was no enthusiastic, passionate affection that I felt for her, although, perhaps, the love partook of the best part both of enthusiasm and passion, in the intense reality that caused it to be interwoven with my life so completely. It grew to be as much a part of the various, multiform personality that I call *me*, as the eyes whereby I see, or the soul wherewith I feel. She suited me. The thoughts she expressed aroused echoes in my spirit which, it seemed, were waiting to be aroused. And the recondite beliefs, speculations, hopes, and doubts that I sometimes confessed, were her own also. I could see it by the flash of sympathy that lit her face. She had believed and doubted, hoped and imagined, the self-same things. So in her face I often saw looks that must have been, I thought, familiar to me in my very infancy. Her smile would sometimes send my thoughts voyaging back upon the misty sea of the past, with, as it seemed, a new compass to steer by, a new light to lead. I could believe the eastern fable of twin-created souls, in looking on and listening to her.

But I am not going to enlarge on this period. I always feel a certain reluctance when I am expressing the thoughts and feelings of those days, or, indeed, when I express my thoughts of her at any time. But I would have you to understand that I am not romantic, nor poetical, nor imaginative. In those days I used to believe myself entirely free from such "weaknesses." Neither then nor at any time was it my habit to be demonstrative of any state of feeling within myself. Externally, at least, I have always been a

quiet, staid, matter-of-fact man. In relating to you my history *now*, it may be that I cannot but unconsciously colour it with those feelings intensified by time and thought, which, when felt, I scarcely recognised. But I am not a romancist; I can simply set down facts; and feelings such as these that I tell you of, *are* facts, stubborn as any demonstrated by science.

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The day before I was to leave the neighbourhood, I had an interview with Mr. Clive. I told him I loved his daughter—that she loved me—that we asked his consent to our marriage. The old man was much amazed—that I had expected; but he seemed troubled also by an amount of perplexity and indecision, which I in my turn was surprised at. The cause came out at last—my religious opinions. Scientific men have a bad reputation with the Church; and my beliefs, or rather unbeliefs, were sufficiently patent to the intelligent public at large to render it no marvel that the Rev. Charles Clive should have heard of them.

Poor old man! he found much difficulty in stating this to me. He was gentle and good; true of heart, though feeble in intellect—a type of a class that I, for one, had not had much experience of. In his weakness I was ready to believe; but I was not prepared for the straightforward sincerity and the indomitable, although mock-seeming, steadiness with which he finally gave me my answer.

He spoke even firmly then, although it was after much nervous hesitation, and many awkward, half-finished sentences. He told me he appreciated the advantages which (he was pleased to say) were offered by connection with a man distinguished as myself; and the words of compliment assumed a curious air of truthfulness as he uttered them in his quavering voice. Also—and there the accents grew yet more unassured—he knew that Paula loved me, and he could not bear to pain her—to cause her grief. “But, sir,” said he, with sudden firmness, “I cannot give my daughter to an unbeliever. I could never look her mother in the face when I meet her in heaven, if I did. No, sir; I cannot. Do not ask me.”

He looked beseechingly at me, his clasped hands trembling.

Nevertheless, though he trembled, I noted with some perplexity the unflinching brightness of the eyes he fixed on me. In them burned a light I could not understand, even as in his tone and manner were manifest a strength and resolution, incomprehensible to me, because so incongruous with my gauge of his character.

Howbeit, whatever was the cause of his courageous decision, I saw it was useless to attempt to combat it then and there, and I therefore at once assured him I should not weary him by my entreaties. I merely hinted that I thought his objection strange, considering that Paula Clive, clergyman's daughter though she was, already shared my own doubts (I used that mild word), and believed in very many of my own theories. He said nothing to this, but only looked again at me with the curious, helpless, entreating gaze which I could not quite reconcile with the determination he displayed ; so I left him.

I went to Paula, who was sitting in the garden, under a grand old horse-chestnut tree that stood sentinel at the very end of the domain. She looked up from her book as I came near, with the still eloquent smile which, on *her* face, was as beautiful as it was rare. I smiled in answer, for I did not feel at all seriously troubled by Mr. Clive's obduracy. In fact, I was more puzzled than annoyed. I had not been accustomed to find men so staunch and uncompromising in their adherence to their beliefs, as was this old man, for all his apparent weakness and gentleness. As I have said, I could not understand it. I had known men eminent for talent, learning, strength, and capacity of intellect, and I valued them accordingly. Also, because I prized my own honour, and had due respect for my own conscience, I believed in other men's honourableness and conscientiousness. But it was only to a certain extent. I could not believe in a man abiding conscientiously by this faith in what I held *must* not only be, but seem, utterly chimerical to any sound, clear intellect. Therefore I landed at last in the conviction that Paula's father was not so much to be admired for his consistency, as compassionated for his blind adherence to a rotten creed. He was not the first by many whom I, from my height of superior knowledge, and in the daring courage



of a strong brain, and a nature able to stand alone, had so pitied, so looked down upon.

However, I told Paula, and was newly amazed to note the earnest, deep-feeling seriousness with which she heard what her father had said. Nay, when I had concluded, and after a silence, during which she turned her head aside, and seemed to be idly playing with one of the fan-like leaves of the tree, I saw two tears fall upon her lap—the first tears I had ever seen her shed.

“Why, Paula, what is this?”

She looked at me, neither ashamed nor with any other shade of self-consciousness; but there was a peculiar softness in her face, such as I had never noted before.

“I must make my poor father very unhappy,” she presently said, with her usual simplicity and directness of diction. “I wish it were not so.”

She paused, and seemed meditating: the softness grew and grew in her face—the “level fronting eyelids” trembled, and again the tears came, but this time rested unshed. I could hardly bear to see the tender beauty of her look, albeit I stood quietly watching and analysing every inflection of her face with what may have seemed the grave, dispassionate regard proper to a *servant*.

“If my mother had lived,” she next said, in a loving, lingering, low-toned voice, that was as strange to hear as were her tears to see, “it would have been different. I should have been different.”

“How so, Paula?”

“I should have believed as she believed. I remember when she died, and said, ‘God take care of my child!’ I almost *felt* the blessing descending upon me. I never doubted then—I never knew what distrust and uncertainty were *then*——”

“You were a child.”

“Yes.” She was silent some minutes. Then she lifted her eyes to me, with a slow sweet smile. “I am glad I have been a child,” she said.

“But you would not wish to grow backward, and become one now?”

She did not answer.

"You would not exchange even the least beautiful truth for the fairest of illusions?"

"No; O no!" she replied, earnestly; and she rose, and leaned upon my arm, and pressed her brow upon my shoulder, murmuring, half to herself, the old, often-repeated words of Othello, "'Tis better as it is—'tis better as it is.'"

Then we began to talk over the question of Mr. Clive's disapprobation of our marriage. I was thoroughly unprepared for the firm decision with which she declared that until his consent was obtained the marriage must not be. But she believed that when he saw her happiness was concerned he would not long remain inexorable. I said nothing, but mused on the possibility of employing other means of moving the old man's resolution.

Circumstances soon made for themselves a way. Mr. Clive, like most men of his calibre, had a habit of pinning his practice, if not his faith, on the opinions of at least one other man. He had an inordinate respect and reverence for the great man of the parish, Mr. Halliwell—the clever, benevolent, much-beloved squire and lord of the manor; and he might have found many a worse monitor. Mr. Halliwell was a thorough type of respectable goodness. He loved his country, his church, and his queen—everything, in fact, that it is proper and advisable for a man to love; while he hated nothing, not even radicals and dissenters, merely reserving for those benighted classes a calm and gentleman-like compassion. It is with such men, I think, that the world seems to thrive most flourishingly. Certainly *his* tenants were never insolvent—*his* speculations never failed—while as to minor matters, his house, his grounds, and his stables were perfect models of fortunate as well as judicious arrangement.

With Mr. Halliwell I was on excellent terms. He was a man of the world, and valued my society and friendship for many reasons. I had a fund of information at disposal, that was continually happening to be of service to him in his farming and gardening operations. Moreover, I had been able to render him important aid in bringing under official notice an ingenious agricultural invention of his—I forget now of what nature; but I might have saved his life, I think, and made less impression upon his sense of obligation.

I suppose after I left the Manor House, Mr. Clive took the worthy squire into his confidence, and much consultation ensued. Howbeit, only a few days after my departure, I received a letter, signed "Miles Halliwell," stating that he and his excellent and reverend friend had been considering various questions in which I was interested—would I kindly join them on the ensuing Saturday? as my correspondent especially thought it desirable I should do so, and he concluded with some vague suggestions of "possible results," &c.

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In brief, the final result arrived at in two separate committees of the clergyman and the squire, the squire and myself, was satisfactory in the highest degree. It was Mr. Halliwell's acute, clear-seeing judgment which at once hit upon the solution of the difficulty. Provided Paula Clive and Lewis Heber were married according to the form appointed by the Church of England, he could see no reasonable obstacle to the union. And to this argument, after some deliberation and a good deal of reasoning and persuasion on the part of Mr. Halliwell, Paula's father yielded. I was then asked if I had any objection to my part of the agreement, to which, with gravity, I replied in the negative; and I went with the old man's formal consent to ask Paula to name our marriage-day.

But here I met with an unexpected opposition. I shall never forget the sudden and brilliant joy that lit up her face with a wonderful dawn of radiance when she saw me—heard what I had to tell, and clasped my hand as if to assure herself it was *real*. But then how she shrunk back, and what a pale shadow came over her—even to her very figure, I thought—when I told her the condition, named by me very much as a matter of course.

"Oh, not that, Lewis—not that!" she said, tremulously.

I laughed at her at first, but not for long. I soon saw that even I must submit to recognise her scruples as something more than a sickly fancy, unworthy her high womanly sense and feeling. No force of argument, no persistency of logic, had power to move her from the position she assumed. "She could not for expediency subscribe by lip or action to



what her heart did not believe. She would not contemplate so hideous a wrong."

"Wrong! To whom, Paula?" I asked.

She paused a minute, and clasped her hands hurriedly, as if in a kind of spasm of mental pain.

"To myself, if to nothing else," she then answered. "I could not bear to look into my own heart—I could not endure the chafings of my own conscience, if I stooped to such turpitude. I, who have cried out against hypocrisies, which, compared with this, were excusable and harmless! I to sin against the law of truth, which you yourself confess beautiful and worthy of obedience! Lewis, do not ask me to play traitor to my only faith!"

I listened to her without interrupting the passionate flood of words, so unlike her usual calm and almost reticent manner of speech. I watched the changing flush on her cheek, the sparkle that shone with almost a lurid lustre in her eyes. I tried to interpret to myself these signs of something new and strange in the still, contained nature of Paula Clive. But I was not then learned enough in the mysteries of a woman's heart to be able to translate it aright. I remember my first thought was, that her love for me must be less than I had imagined. Also, I sighed to myself, recognising the weakness inherent, it must be, to feminine humanity, since even Paula was not exempt from it—the weakness which was betrayed in the indescribably hopeless, helpless tone in which she uttered the last three words. And I marvelled why it was that this lingering, desperate desire of some faith—some object for guidance, if not for worship—had never manifested itself in Paula so strongly and visibly as now. Perhaps a glimmer of the truth reached me when, as I took her hands in mine, she drooped her head with one swift upturned glance at me—an eloquent glance. Perhaps I allowed to myself that I might be deceived, and it was from no weakness, still less from weakness in her love for me, that this proud-souled woman was thus subdued before me. All these reflections passed in orderly array through my mind as I stood beside her, looking into her face, and at last compelling her to look into mine.

"Ah, don't smile!" she cried, with a restless movement of the hands I held. I had not known I smiled, but I curbed my lip into quietude before I spoke. Then briefly I set before her—not any new arguments, not any fresh appeal to her intellectual appreciation—but simply the question,—what was to become of *me* if she persevered in her resistance to this, the only means by which she might at once become my wife? I told her what a dreary life that would be to which she would exile me. I warned her that she, and she only as my wife, could have power to detain me from joining an expedition, she had heard of before, which was about to proceed on a service of imminent danger to the seat of the then war. If she wilfully crushed the love out of my life, be it for years or for ever, I would take refuge in the man's ambition, which I could be almost content to forswear for her, did she so will it. And then, having enlarged on this branch of my subject, I expatiated with some suppressed scorn on the real nature of the obstacles that appeared to her of such mammoth dimensions—of such irresistible force. I contrasted the gain—granting there was a gain—with the loss which would arise from the maintenance of her conscientious scruples. I showed her the picture of respected prejudices, and two lives blighted, if not ruined, on the one hand; and, on the other, the *letter* of right-doing given up for the spirit.

"For you know, you feel, Paula, that there is only one right, true, best fate for you and me on earth. You are my wife—I your husband—let what will interfere. Shall a paltry form, a conventional observance, a trivial sacrifice to the weakness of those around us—shall such a thing have power to effect that which a million devils, did they exist, should be impotent to do? I hold my own—I hold you! I defy this puny mannikin of superstition to wrest you from me. Look me in the face, Paula. Tell me to go if you will."

But she clung close. I triumphed. In my haste I suffered some expression of exultation to escape me. I *knew* she must see the right at last—I *knew* the cloud that had obscured her quick sense, her clear brain, would pass away.

"No!" she cried, standing a little apart from me, but clasping my hands still. Her look was changed, so was her

voice; but her eyes dwelt on me as she proceeded, calmly and slowly, "Not so, Lewis. I have not been blinded—I am not blind now. I feel and know, clearly and strongly, as I did before, that there is a terrible wrong—hideous, unnatural—in this thing that you name so slightly. Nay, do not speak. To *me* it is a wrong. I confess it—I face it—I dare it. I will take its penalty. Even that I can bear better than——"

But the rest I would not let her speak.

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So we were married that day five weeks in the little country church, with snow on the fields around, and enchanted hoar frost on the great trees that overhung the Gothic porch, and a winter robin singing his ever interrupted song at the oriel window. Miles Halliwell, Esq., and his lady were present: her father gave away the bride. She was dressed in white, and was duly pale and self-possessed. The dean of the neighbouring city, an intimate friend of Mr. Halliwell, performed the ceremony. Nothing could be more *selon les règles*. For a winter wedding every one declared it quite perfect, and to have "gone off" admirably.

But I best recollect, when we were driving in the chaise to the seaport whence we were to embark for the continent, the thrill of satisfied, rejoicing, infinite contentment with which I drew my wife close to me, feeling then, and not till then, that she was *my own*.

"Safely my own! Thank God!" I said, in the thoughtless, meaningless—it *must* be meaningless—spirit in which I, and others like me, have said, and do say, those words.

But Paula said nothing, I well remember.

## PART II.

WE travelled abroad for two or three weeks, and then returned to what was to be our home. After the bright and beautiful scenes through which we had been wandering, the London street looked but dreary; the house, handsome and

well-appointed though it was, appeared dark, and, as I thought, soulless. But that was only natural till our daily life, entwined about the dull walls, environing the still furniture, had made it all beautiful, and we knew it as our home.

Yet, even after we were settled in the place, I sometimes fancied it was but a dismal abode in which to bestow my Paula, country born and bred, and loving the green fields and breezy hills, with the passionate and abiding love of her deep and strong nature. Not that any look, gesture, or tone of hers ever betrayed that she missed or needed anything that her new life did not contain. But occasionally, and not seldom, it struck me that the long line of grim and dusky houses, windowed alike in hideous brick-and-mortar regularity—the prospect which was all on which her eyes could rest as she looked up from book or work—it struck me that it was singularly incongruous with her own aspect, her free bearing, her looks, that so expressed the noble, liberty-loving soul. Such a face as my wife's was never taught its changing inflections, its straight fearlessness of glance, its steady gaze that would not be denied, within the cramped limits of a city's streets.

Nevertheless she never murmured. Nay, that is too little to say, and does not sufficiently indicate the spirit of brave, bright cheerfulness with which she illuminated our house, grim and dusky though it was. At last I grew to believe that she *must* be abundantly content, because she made me feel so. I asked, I needed no more than I had. I pursued my vocation as intently, and almost as engrossingly, as if no image of Paula ever came between me and the business of my life. But it did come; and, hard man of science though I had been held to be, I owned its sweetness, and breathed more freely for its presence. And then, during the long evenings that I snatched from my laboratory, it seemed to me that I tasted a new life, when, looking up from my grave folios and calculating papers, I saw my wife seated in her accustomed chair, working busily, but not so busily but she was quick to respond to my glance. The sudden smile that would then come trembling to her mouth seemed to make the whole face vibrate, as it were, with tenderness. I

marked it, and to one who knew me less entirely than she did it might have appeared that I marked it unmoved. But it was not so. I loved my wife with all the might of my manhood, with the whole strength of my soul. She knew that, and rested in the knowledge, for she was one of the rare women whose nature could contain *repose*. I think she must have been at least very nearly happy in these days. There was such a wealth of love and utter trust between us, that it made up for, and even hid, the poverty that existed in other directions. I know it did so *quite* to me. I believe it was almost as successful with her, and that she was very nearly happy, as I have said.

We went into society occasionally. That Mrs. Heber should be admired was inevitable; but it happened that I was seldom satisfied with the kind of admiration that reached my ears.

"How beautiful your wife is!" said Lady Craven, who was self-privileged to be rude, under the disguise of candour. "As Miss Clive she was striking, grand-looking; a sort of Zenobia—a woman born to empery. But now there is an added sweetness, a subdued brilliance, an indescribable beauty of aspect and manner. It is very charming."

I liked this none the more because I knew that the speaker, parrot-like, was only repeating the opinions of others whose judgment was valuable. It irritated, displeased me. I looked at my wife. I contrasted the figure I then saw with that which, not many months before, I had first noted, standing so erect under the radiance of the chandelier.

Now she was sitting on a sofa, against the deep ruby velvet of which her face and figure were as if sculptured. Her head was slightly bent forward, for she was listening to the gentleman who stood talking to her, and presently, at something he said, the soft lustre that had used to be so rare, kindled in her eyes; she looked round vaguely and instinctively, and caught my glance. Her answering smile brought me to her side, and I learned what it was that interested her so much. Some scheme for female education, about to be undertaken by various ladies, had aroused her earnest sympathy. She was desirous of being one among these self-constituted teachers. She had time to spare, she would



love such a work, and she could do it she thought. Did I think so too? And she looked to me for approbation. I smiled indulgently. She surely *could* do it, if she willed so, I said. And I left her talking eagerly, asking questions, planning, deciding, upon this important matter.

Another time Lady Craven attacked me because my wife had given up writing.

"Ah," said she, shaking her fan affectedly, "no more books now. How shall we punish you, Mr. Heber, for depriving us of so much enjoyment?"

"Believe me, your reproach is sufficient," said I, truly enough. And then some inscrutable feeling led me to tell her of the new work which Paula was undertaking. I did not choose people to suppose that she was content to subside into an ordinary, every-day matron.

But a few days afterwards I noted an unusual restlessness about Paula. A curious glitter was in her eyes, a singular sharpness in her voice. At last both traits gradually subsided, and she talked and looked as she was wont. Quietly, and as if incidentally, she mentioned to me that she had given up her plan of teaching the poor girls. Surprised, I asked why.

"I did not feel fit for the work," was all she replied; and then irresistibly turned the conversation to another and alien subject.

Yes, I myself began to perceive the difference between Miss Clive and Mrs. Heber. And though I compressed my lips with a feeling of perplexity which, to a nature like mine, must always be one of pain, I still could not in my heart, whatever were the cause of change, wish her to be other than she was. Yet I had often laughed to myself at the folly of men who were captivated by women who were eminent for *womanly* qualities. But, now my attention was awakened, I detected day by day in Paula traits which showed how philosophy, learning, wisdom, intellect, were all growing subservient attributes. The authoress, the student, the brain-worker, were all giving place, and she was becoming simply and merely--a woman. I had used to think her such a woman as the world of old Greece might have known, who made the fables of goddess-

hood seem no extravagances. But now, the goddess bearing was gone; the regal aspect was usurped by one, sweet and gentle as any mild-eyed girl's among the crowd I had been accustomed to disdain. And I was puzzled, while I kept watch.

I remember, one evening in spring, I had been attracted by some primroses in Covent Garden Market, and brought them home to Paula. She took them very silently, I thought, and bore them to a distant table to arrange them. But when I presently approached her, she looked up, and did not attempt to disguise the tears that had been falling.

"Oh, Lewis! they remind me so of the spring that is somewhere, though I cannot see it."

This from Paula! Tears over a few hedgeway flowers! Over the remembrance of the country and the spring! She had changed indeed. But, even if I thought it childish, I loved her for it.

I said, "You shall see the spring if you wish. We will go into the country next week."

And we went. It was the very first advent of spring, which seemed to be dancing in an abandonment of happiness over the whole earth. And Paula almost danced too, as if in the joyousness of regained freedom. Her face looked like a child's sometimes, when she lifted it to me from her primrose gathering, holding the flowers before my eyes with ineffable delight. I learned to love them all for her sake, and to listen with her to her favourite blackbird's song, and watch with her the tiny dew-brightened gossamers that hung to the hedges in the early morning. I believe that I, too, almost became a child again. That was an enchanted season. There would seem to be something in the spring-time which brings out the latent youthfulness of spirit in all of us with whom it yet lingers.

But on the brightness and beauty of that time came a sudden and unexpected grief. Her father was taken ill, and she was summoned to what the physician told her was his death-bed. We set out instantly for ———, but we arrived too late. The old man was dead, and I could only hold Paula to my heart, while she, in speechless woe, listened to the doctor as he delivered the message committed to him by his dying patient.

His last words were of his daughter. He and her mother, he said, would wait for her in heaven. And there I bade the speaker cease, and leave us ; for I felt her strong, passionate sobs rising against my breast ; and they burst forth when we were alone. Great, hopeless shrieks rent the air, and her face—my Paula's face—grew dark with a mighty agony that I could not then understand. Nevertheless, I tried to soothe her. In vain. She sprang from me suddenly, and stood aloof, gazing at me like one distraught.

" You tell me to be calm, to be comforted ! " she cried. " You—you—you who know—— "

She stopped, the shrill voice broke down, and she fell helplessly at my feet.

After that a brain fever prostrated her for many weeks. From the ravings of its delirium I learned strange new things, that my man's instinct had failed to discover—that all my science, and learning, and logic could never have helped me to comprehend.

Trees, birds, flowers, skies, were mingled in a chaotic crowd ; while through it all seemed to stalk a dreadful incarnation, a mysterious conception of Something, which alternately she shrieked to in wild entreaty, or shrank from in horrible terror. Then she would seem to be stooping over the spring rivulet, gathering the spring flowers, as so lately I had really seen her. Murmuring to them, she would seem to shed her whole soul's tenderness over their beauty, their innocence, their happiness, till at last she seemed almost to rest in a sort of quiet trance, silent and at peace. But when that passed by, the paroxysm of convulsive fever was sure to succeed. Her diseased fancy ran riot then. Sometimes it seemed she imagined it was I, her husband, who was dead ; and she would say in a hoarse, quiet tone—a fearful tone, that it made even me shrink to listen to—that she had expected it for very long.

" Ever since I loved him I knew it. I knew he would go. He would go ! " And on the word the voice rose to a desperate cry. Often I buried my head in my hands, almost unable to bear to hear, or see any more of the indescribable horror her every word and look expressed. And once, rousing myself from a half stupor, after some such suffering, I was amazed



to perceive that she had become suddenly quiet. And even as I sprang towards her she moved her arms that had been wildly tossed above her head, folded the hands one on another, and, while a ghastly smile flickered on her face, the lips began to move. For a long time I could not detect the meaning of the low utterances; but at last, with a long sighing breath, some words became audible:—

*“Pray God bless mamma and papa, and make Paula a good child.”*

And presently she fell asleep—a calm, restful sleep, from which she awoke conscious—feeble, more feeble than I can tell, so very frail was the thread by which she held to life for many days after. But—she lived.

During the days of her convalescence, when at length she was able to move from one room to another, she used to lie on the sofa, with her head turned to the window, her eyes wandering about the familiar prospect with unrestful eagerness. Sometimes they would fill with tears, unaware, I think, to herself. Great, grieving tears they were that fell heavily on the thin cheeks, and then her eyes went back to their old quest. What was she seeking, I often wondered, with that wistful gaze of hers?

I dared not ask her. I was becoming a coward. Within the last few weeks a new world of possibilities had opened before me. Those had been dreadful lessons taught by Paula. I could not bear to know more of the horror surging under the quiet surface of her soul. I let it be. I stood by, silent and passive. The great tears swelled in my darling's eyes, fell on her white cheeks, and oftentimes the mouth quivered and the hands were clenched, as in terrible pain; but I said never a word, gave never a sign. Rather I moved farther from her side, or looked more intently on the book I held in my hand.

When—but, O heaven! what had I to offer in barter for the power to comfort her? And how helpless I was! Her favourite dog, that came and licked her hand, or looked pensively and lovingly up at his sick mistress—he possessed as much power as I.

At last she was strong enough to travel, and change was prescribed for her. We were to proceed to Italy, and stay

there, for the next few months. The last day of our sojourn in the old village she asked to be allowed to walk a little way by herself. At first I remonstrated; but when she pointed to the little churchyard, I yielded. Better she should go alone, I thought, *there*. So I watched her as she went. But presently, overcome by an intolerable gnawing feeling, half of strange curiosity, half of terrible anxiety, I followed her.

She stood leaning on the gravestone at the head of the two solemn mounds, one green and daisy-covered, the other brown and rough as yet. Something in the mere pitiful fact of this daughter bending over the graves of her father and her mother, smote me with a sense of mysterious sorrow that was not all sorrow.

Something like sympathy stirred at my heart. It gave me singular courage. I drew near to her. In a moment I had my arm round her—I held her close. I felt strong, as if I could give *her* strength.

“Paula—wife!” I said.

She turned to me a still face, with a sad, forced smile just flickering on the brows.

“I am ready; let us go, husband.”

Her arm rested on mine, her eyes were bent on me, and, with a steady step, and the same faint smile about her face, she walked from the graveyard.

At the gate she paused, and looked back. Lush with summer were grass, and flower, and tree. Grey clouds kept back the sunshine, and softened the light. I remember well what we saw that minute, and the sound that then fell on my ears—Paula’s low trembling voice faltering these words:—

“If we should be wrong, and I not comfortless ——?”

Oh, the anguish of the questioning look she turned on me! But I answered nothing—I could answer nothing. She said no more. We passed through the little wicket, and it closed after us, breaking the stillness with a harsh noise.

## PART III.

THE foreign mission which had enabled me again to leave England, occupied more than a year. During that time, we traversed almost the whole extent of the European continent, seldom staying more than a few weeks in each place, till during the last month or two, when we were able to live quietly in a little Neapolitan village on the shores of the Adriatic. I had daily business at the town a few miles off, but I used to return early, and Paula and I had many happy wanderings. The sky, the sea, the air, were all so bright and so peaceful, they could not but impart some of their brightness and peace to her. She had been bravely cheerful all through our wanderings, but I had detected how much strong effort it had needed to make her so. Now, it seemed to me, she was at once quieter and more truly serene. She did not attempt to laugh or talk gaily; her voice and manner became more natural, if less mirthful. Sometimes she was thoughtful, and she had not allowed herself to be so for a long time, I knew. One thing also I noted, at first with a strangely mingled feeling of wonder and apprehension. Continually she read, studied, pored over a little Book that had been her father's. On those sunny afternoons, when I rode back to her, I used often to find her with that volume on her lap seated in the rude balcony of our casella, looking out over the sea intently, with something of the same searching look that I had seen long ago in her eyes, but never since. When I approached she would look up with a startled, pained look, and place the Bible aside. The Bible! To me it was but a dead record as of a science which newer and stronger light had found defective. What was it to her? I never asked her—she never told me. But I think I can guess, now.

One day, the last of our stay in the place, when I returned, as usual, from my daily journey, she was not in the balcony, nor in the house, nor in any of her usual haunts. The old woman who performed the part of servant for us, told me that she believed the signora had gone into the village, with a poor woman who had come to her for help.

"She has a sick child, *la poverina*," added she, "and the signora gave her money, and then went after her with wine and meat."

So, having received directions as to the locality of the *casucciaccia* wherein dwelt poor Madalena, who was the widow of a fisherman lost at sea the summer before, I wended my way thither. There was a little gathering of women and children about the open door, and, from their ejaculations and gestures, I was at no loss to understand that the child was in great danger. I had a curious feeling as I heard them frequently utter my wife's name, with many exclamations of praise and gratitude, and frequent benedictions. My first instinctive fear was, lest the illness in the miserable dwelling wherein Paula had been lingering, was infectious; but of this apprehension I was relieved at once.

The poor mother's voice, sharp and clear, met my ears as I entered the outer room. Then my Paula spoke—very softly, but I heard every word.

"We have done all we can for him: we must *hope*, now."

"And *pray*! Ah, Holy Mary, look on me! Virgin Mother, have pity! Help me—help my child!" shrieked Madalena. A torrent of passionate prayers, uttered with shrill rapidity, followed. Then for a moment she paused. "Signora, pray for me to your God. You that have been so good to me—ah, pray for me, that the child may live!"

I went into the inner room. There stood Paula, motionless and pale, by the wretched bed whereon lay the child. Madalena had flung herself before a rude wooden crucifix, and was again uttering her earnest, imploring cries; while Paula watched her, but never spoke.

I touched her, and entreated her to come away. The child was evidently dying, and I dreaded the effect of so much painful excitement upon her. But she shook her head. She would stay. I stood aside, and looked on. When the last painful convulsions came on, it was Paula who raised little Beppo's head, and cradled it on her shoulder; for the mother was helpless with agony, and could do nothing.

And so, on my wife's bosom, the child died. She and I

both watched the almost imperceptible "passing away" of that mysterious thing we call Life. We both saw the final spasm, and then the gradual and wonderful quietude which presently came over the little dead face.

Madalena seemed stricken into an awe yet greater than woe by the sight. She fell on her knees beside it with a terrible cry, and then was silent and still for many minutes. Hope and fear seemed to have sunk together heavily, in the empty heart. The look she wore was infinitely pathetic. I did not wonder at Paula's fast-falling tears, and I was even glad to see them. \* \* \* I left the two women to themselves for a little space. When I returned, Paula was ready to go home with me, having appointed one of the village women to stay with Madalena, and see all done for her that could be done. A chorus of women's voices followed Paula when she left.

"The Holy Virgin bless you, and make you a happy mother!"

She clung to my arm, shivering.

"Poor Madalena! poor mother!" said I, to break the long silence that held us as we walked along.

"Happy mother!" she cried quickly, turning her flushed face towards me. "Happy mother! she waits to see her child, her husband again. In her heart, in her faith, she possesses them *for ever*. Happy Madalena!"

"A childish faith that speaks in parrot prayers, my Paula."

"Ah, she prays, she believes! It saves her heart from breaking; but I—I cannot, cannot pray, even for my little unborn child."

The words were uttered rapidly, almost as if without her will. Then she was silent, and I also. We reached home, and sat long in the balcony, watching the purple sea deepen to black in the twilight. Stars came out, and the incessant murmur of the waves striving against the shore made solemn music. I stole my arm round my wife's waist. Then, and not till then, a wild sob was suffered to break through her self-imposed calm. Her head drooped on my shoulder, and she wept freely and sweetly. Yes, sweetly. They were not the burning, passionate tears she had been used to shed of old, but



a very woman's torrent of tender, blessed rain, that relieved and freshened the air in falling. In the midst of them she faltered forth some words. I bent my ear to catch them.

"If—if, when our Wish is born, any ill should come near it, what should I do? where should we look?"

I tried to soothe her as one would soothe a frightened child.

"Lewis, Lewis, I am so afraid, so *afraid!*" She pronounced the word in a tone that lent it new and deepened meaning. "I never feared before like this, even for you. Teach me to be brave—teach me not to care."

"You are brave, my darling. You were always brave."

"I know I *was*. Tell me some of the old things I used to say, and believed that I believed. They were the first links of sympathy between us, do you remember? Our mutual scorn of traditions, of the slavery of opinion—our yearning for truth and freedom. How often we have talked of all these things! We thought alike, felt alike, and it strengthened me to feel myself always so close beside you. Why, how, have I gone astray, so that you can support and strengthen me no longer? Lewis, Lewis, bring me back again!"

But I could not. At that moment, instinctively I felt the vanity of all my logic, and I could not mock her with it now. She went on in the same trembling, excited tone,—

"Only a little while ago, and for even the clearest-headed, purest-hearted believer, I could feel nothing but a proud, self-gratulating compassion. Out of the strength of my intellect I pitied all those who were so weak as to have faith, Lewis. And now, have I scorned the faith that comforted and was held dear by the wise and good, only at last to yearn for that which my eyes *will* see, is unworthy? Is blind credulity, is superstition, is ignorance better and wiser than all *we* have tried to teach ourselves? I envy, I would give my whole life to be able to feel for one little minute like that poor mother this morning, praying at the feet of a wooden image. Ay, though her child died—though it died!" Her voice rose, strained to a pitiful shrillness. "For she *believes* she shall see it again. To her, husband, child, and all the glory and beauty of life are immortal. Is it ignorance that gives to people such wealth as this? Husband, teach me to be

ignorant! Unlearn in me all that has entered into my mind through this false, treacherous Reason, that deserts me in my need. 'People go mad sometimes. What is intellect, or knowledge, or learning, or the wisdom *we* have thought so wise, worth *then*?' "

I essayed to calm her. She listened while I spoke to her in the old way, went over again the old arguments that once, *she* had helped me to advance and support. I thought I succeeded in impressing her; for, when I had ended, she only replied by a quiet sigh.

"You have been too much excited to-day, my Paula. To-morrow you will see things differently."

"Shall I?" she said, absently.

And she rose from her seat, and leaned over the balcony, looking out into the starlit night. There was silence, except for the wistful, ever-desiring voice of the sea. The soft air just moved the thin folds of her robe, and in the dimness I could discern the outline of her face, most beautiful, most pure, defined by the heavy braids of black hair. Somehow the quietude of the time, the conflicting influences that were about me, stole into my heart with a strange tenderness. For the first time in my man's life I wished—ay, I wished——

But that was folly, and I cast aside with shame, the half-formed thought.

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That was, as I have said, our last day in Italy. Next morning we departed for England. I did not take Paula back to the dreary London house. Instead, I had caused to be put in readiness for us, a cottage on the outskirts of town, where, amid the green fields, with fresh air blowing among the many trees of the garden, there was a pleasant feeling of healthfulness and quiet. Here, one soft September day, our child was born.

Well named our Wish, was our fair little baby girl. In the joy of her coming, all disquiet, all doubt, all pain, was lost. Like the fevered visions of a past night, all remembrance of bygone heaviness and trouble seemed to depart from us. A new and happier life seemed opening to us with the advent of this tiny, helpless one. A wonderful strength seemed aroused in Paula. With returning convalescence there came to her

more than renewed vigour, both of mind and body. A healthful brightness shone over her face; her voice sounded once more clear and ringing. With her baby in her arms she often looked to me completely, perfectly happy. And by virtue of some mysterious power that the simple fact of motherhood would seem to exert over all pure woman-nature, I believe she was so; nay, that it was not possible for her to be otherwise, just then.

It lasted, or I thought so, for many months. Our Wish throve and grew apace, like other babies, doubtless, though to Paula, and to me too, it seemed a perpetual, special miracle that was working under our eyes. No very terrible anxieties marred our happiness in her babyhood. Her first serious ailment came when she was nearly twelve months old. Then, indeed, it was a dark time, and the desperate look I knew of yore, began to shadow Paula's face. But the illness was passed safely, and the gloom went with it.

Yet from that time, there was a change. Hitherto the child had almost been a part of herself. On her lap, in her arms, or at her feet, Wish had always been with her. The helpless dependency of her babyhood, had been to the mother the dearest, sweetest blessing of her life. But from this time every month, every week seemed to take away from the blessing, and render it less perfect. And as little Wish progressed in strength and growth, and learned, first to creep along the floor, then to stand on her timid, staggering little feet, and at last to walk or run fearlessly and alone—as all these epochs in baby life, one by one, came to pass, and the child's existence became daily more separate from her own, Paula's complete joy faded, her contentment fled. An ever-restless anxiety began to rack her heart. To leave the child, even for an hour, was, I knew, utter misery to her. Yet, the period of helpless, clinging infancy being over, there was no excuse for the mother to neglect other duties in her constant devotion to her child, and Paula was too inexorably conscientious, to give way to those pangs of yearning that would continually have detained her with her little one.

Still, for all the pain, there were many halcyon intervals of happiness both for Paula and me. On summer afternoons, when we sat under the trees in our sunny garden, with Wish playing



at our feet, plucking up the grass and flowers, and bringing them to us to see, we would plan her future, guess what she would be like as a woman, and imagine her a wife and a mother, bringing her children about us when we were old people. That was happiness. The vanity of "planning," the over-daring of looking forward so far, never seemed to strike us. We allowed ourselves to dream and prefigure thus to each other: it was our favourite pastime. Pleasant it was to look up from our murmured musings to the child herself. She was very quiet always, and liked nothing better than sitting on the grass, crooning softly to herself over the daisies or the flowers we had gathered for her, often stroking them with her tiny fingers, as if they were sentient things. She was a happy little creature. Childish ills seemed to come lightly to her. She never pined or fretted, and seldom cried with the passionate grieving or anger, that seems natural to most young children. Her little life flowed on serenely, equably, and we watched it, and were content. It was not either of us, who first noted the fact that our Wish, if she were never pettish, restless, or unhappy, like other children, also never showed any of the glee, of the overwhelming *life* that is so manifest in "other children."

I remember the day that my friend pointed out this fact to me. The child (she was then nearly four years old) was sitting in her accustomed place at her mother's feet, her radiant little head leaning against her mother's skirt. Such a picture they made! My Paula, with her queenly head bent low over her darling, and Wish so fair, so exquisitely, purely fair, with her baby fingers busied among the coloured worsteds she had chosen for playthings.

"How quiet she always is!" said my friend, an eminent physician who lived near us.

His low tone, his intent look at the child, startled me, and I glanced hastily towards Paula. She was smiling happily. I could not tell why her smile smote me with a sense of pain just then. But Dr. Lethby had his hand on the door, and I followed him from the room.

"Yes," said I, indifferently; "little Wish is a quiet child. Only children are apt to be so, I suppose."

"How old is she—nearly four years?"

I nodded. He was silent, but I felt urged on to speak.

"She is backward with her tongue, too, which makes her seem quieter. She can only say a few words very imperfectly."

"I know."

"Your little Lucy, who is not so old, talks quite well, doesn't she? We shall be jealous."

He did not echo my slight laugh. He stood pulling on his gloves, and looking dubiously now at me, now at the ground.

"After all," he muttered, as if to himself, "it may only be a false alarm."

"What alarm?" I had him by the arm, and I compelled him into the adjacent room. I shut the door, and stood with my back against it, to guard it alike from affording ingress to Paula, or egress to the doctor, till he had answered me.

"What is the matter?" said I. "What is wrong? What do you suspect?"

"My dear fellow——" he began.

"In few words, Lethby. I am strong, not patient. In few words."

"You will forgive me if time should prove (as please God it may) that I am mistaken; but for some time I have watched your little girl with apprehension, and I fear—all is not right—with the brain. There is—some defect in the intellect. I fear so. I am not yet sure. Have courage."

I bit my lip till the blood flowed freely, and clenched my hands firmly on the chair I held by. My first impulse was to strike down the man who told me this terrible truth, for I felt it was truth. I had no doubt, no hope—not for a single instant. I *knew* it was as he said.

"Don't tell your wife," he went on, seeing I said nothing, "till the fact is ascertained beyond doubt. Remember, there is hope. I have been mistaken before, when I felt as assured of other things. The suspicion rests on my judgment alone. Nevertheless, it is well you should know—that you should recognise the possibility—you understand? Otherwise, I would not have told you. But precaution, taken in time, may do much."

The mad, animal instinct of passionate retaliation had passed by. I took the hand he held to me, and grasped it

firmly. I thanked him for his kindness, his consideration, in a firm voice. I would not tell my wife; I would wait—guided by him—I would——But then he was without the door, and I closed it on him quickly, and went back to my study.

I sat there thinking till Paula came to seek me. I had wisely planned not to let her know, or suspect—planned like a man, not reckoning on the woman's instinct that is as a second soul within her, and, where she strongly loves, would seem to be almost omniscient. The instant her eyes struck on my face, her own look answered mine. She was on my breast, entreating, in her low, eager voice, that would not be denied nor hushed—entreating, entreating to know all. What ailed me? What ill was impending over me—or the child? Her voice rose to a pitiful cry on those words, *the child*.

Then she looked up at me—holding my eyes with hers by her straight, unflinching gaze—and she listened, while I told her.

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#### PART IV.

AND the weeks grow into months, and the months into years, and little Wish grew tall and fair, like the arum lilies she loved to peer into with her wistful blue eyes. Wistful eyes, indeed, they were, as though perpetually yearning for what they could never find. As she became older the peculiarity of her mind became more evident. It was as if something but inexpugnable mist had been set between her perceptions and her comprehension—nothing more. Nothing more! It was enough. Sometimes a slender rift seemed to open, and let in the light with a sudden, sharp gleam; and then shut close again, more hopelessly, inexorably, than before. At such times the child was sadder than her wont. Usually, she maintained the same quiet but mirthless serenity that had marked her infancy. Her senses were acute, and in their gratification she evinced a delicate, eclectic refinement at which I often marvelled. She seemed instinctively to be drawn to the most perfect flower in the

garden—the fairest trees—the greenest nooks. In the same way, harmoniously-assorted colours, graceful forms, and beautiful music always attracted her; while from all that was less than beautiful, she turned in utter and spontaneous rejection.

She spoke very seldom, though her utterance was distinct, and quite free from defect. But speech seemed unnatural and painful to her; and, unless all other and more habitual means of making herself understood failed her, she scarcely ever voluntarily resorted to it. I think, had it not been for her mother's persistent efforts, her pitifully earnest, never-wearying endeavours, first in teaching the child, and then in inducing her to practise the utterance of the words she had taught—but for this, our Wish would never have taken human speech upon her. As it was, it needed all Paula's care and persuasion to prevent the knowledge slipping from her. The silent, quiet child seemed herself to feel no need of it. Enough for her to cling about us, to nestle in our bosoms, and look up at us with her eyes eloquent of love, or wonder, or perplexity. And her catalogue of emotions seemed completed in these three. She knew nothing of fear, or anger, or distress. Pain, that trial to most childish natures, appeared to have little power over hers. Once, when she slipped down and cut her arm, while Paula was in anguish as she bound up the ugly wound that looked so red and terrible on her fair white flesh, the child herself sat calmly on her mother's lap, and looked at her disturbed face in surprise.

“Does it hurt my darling much?”

“Not much.” A minute after she added slowly, “It hurts *you*, mamma.” And the perplexed look came over her face. Afterwards, when the arm inflamed, and the pain for a few hours was very great, it was only by her involuntary restlessness we could tell she was conscious of it. She never cried or complained, or fretted. She lay on the sofa quite still, except when she changed the position of her bandaged arm, and looking out upon her mother and myself, with steadfast, grave eyes. Ever and anon Paula left her work to hang over her, caress the shining hair, or cover the pale little face with kisses—anything to let free some of the great passion of tenderness that was for ever

throbbing at her heart. And then Wish would respond with her sweet, soft kisses, in silence. But when I went up to her, the dubious expression in her face waxed more intense; and then came the slow, quiet utterance which, perhaps because it was so rare, always seemed to me to create its own fit surrounding stillness.

"Papa, where does it come from?"

"What 'it,' my Wish?"

"This;" and her slight gesture told me what she meant.

"The pain is in the wound the sharp stone made."

After a pause she shook her head, with the old wistful glance.

"Mamma put it in," she said, presently.

"Mamma would not hurt Wish for all the world."

"Who hurts Wish?"

And I said again, "The sharp stone;" but she only turned aside her asking eyes, and dropped into silence.

Over such instances as these, how Paula and I pondered! How we treasured them in our remembrance, cheering ourselves with the thought of them, often, when a long interval of strange, unchildish quietude and muteness had almost slain the embryo Hope in our hearts!

The child was always with her mother. She did not care to play with other children: from their boisterous games she instinctively drew aside, neither could she join in their chatter over pictures and story-books: for, though Wish would soon be nine years old, all our pains had been ineffectual to make her comprehend anything of the mysteries of the alphabet. All was dark to her there; she could not penetrate even so far as the threshold of earthly learning. Nor did she seem to comprehend or be interested in any of the usual interests of children. The stories they repeated to her sometimes, aroused no feeling in her; but Paula and I knew what she liked better. She would listen to us for hours together, while we told her long, dreamy tales of flowers, and birds, and clouds; or said to her, over and over again, musical stanzas, not the sense, but the sound of which appeared to enthrall her in a species of fascination. To wander about the garden, looking at the flowers and *into*



them, in her never-ceasing but inscrutable quest after we knew not what; to listen to the birds, and the wind, and the rain, and the busy little meadow-streams; to watch the clouds, and tree-tops, and the familiar faces about her; and sometimes to listen to us, as I have said—these were her pleasures, and in them her life seemed to pass serenely on. She never needed playmates or other companions; she never seemed less lonely than when alone.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thus, as I have said, she was seldom with other children, though our friend Dr. Lethby's family lived so near us. But one spring it happened that his little daughter Kate had an illness, and for many weeks afterwards was too delicate to go out of doors or play with the other children. In this state the little invalid evinced a singular and persistent desire to have Wish with her. One day that Paula took the child in with her to Mrs. Lethby's, Kate would with difficulty be persuaded to let her go again, and the next morning came a petition that Wish might be suffered to go and spend that day with the ailing little girl, who "fretted after her continually."

Children often have such fancies, especially when they are sick, and Paula and I could hardly refuse to indulge this one. But it seemed strange and painful to take our child into another house, and leave her there, even though she herself seemed satisfied to remain, and stood quietly beside Kate, submissive to have her hands taken, her hair played with, and to be embraced and fondled to the heart's content of her companion.

When she returned to us in the evening, we both thought the visit had done her good. There was more vitality in the little face, and its usual paleness had given place to a delicate colour that we liked to see. But she was very quiet and silent, and, as she sat on Paula's knee for half an hour before her bedtime, she replied chiefly by gestures to our questions concerning her visit. We gathered that she had been very content there, and would like to go again—that she loved Kate and Mrs. Lethby, and the canary birds and the pictures. When we mentioned these last (for Dr. Lethby had a few very fine paintings hanging in his dining-room), she turned

round suddenly, with a wonderfully bright gleam of consciousness or remembrance shining in her face ; but it seemed to pass before she could give it words.

Presently, Paula took her away. She had wished me good night. Her sweet child-kiss still lingered on my lips. I resumed my book ; but, after ten minutes' abstracted poring over it, the recollection of some memoranda to make, some authorities to consult from the bookcase in our room, led me upstairs. The room communicated with the smaller chamber where Wish slept. The door was open between the two, and the light streamed through. I went and lit the lamp by the bookcase, and commenced my search for the needed volume. Paula's voice occasionally sounded from the inner room, where she was undressing the child. Then I was startled by the sweet, clear, little voice of Wish herself :—

“Mamma, I know !”

“What do you know, darling ?”

“I know—I know——.”

Her voice, always low, had dropped to the faintest murmur. Then, suddenly, she ceased, and I could detect the tiny breathings, coming and going, fast and broken, as in an agony of strange excitement.

“My darling, what is it—what ails my Wish ?” came Paula's trembling, hurried tones.

I started to my feet, moved softly, and looked through the half-open door. The mother had clasped her child closely, and was bending over her with a look eloquent, hardly of fear, nor yet hope, but an anguish of both united that I understood. She murmured her question again, in the midst of passionate kisses that she spent over the little fair face ; but the child broke free from her clasp. Gently she raised her head, and looked up into her mother's eyes.

“God ——.” It was said faintly, shyly, yet distinctly, and, having said, she nestled down again, hiding her face.

I moved from the door without glancing at Paula. There came no answer, no word from her. At last the silence was again lightly stirred by the child's voice :—

“Kate asks God to take care of her, and her mamma and papa. I will, too.”

“No, no ; not at *my* knees—not there !” I heard Paula mutter.

"Is it wrong—is Wish wrong? Is God a wrong thing?"

"Hush, hush! Nay, my own darling, it is not wrong. Look up, look up. Mamma cannot bear to see Wish cry."

But the passion of weeping, so rare in the child, was not easily assuaged.

"Mamma, mamma! I thought you would be glad. Wish was so glad."

For a long time I listened to Paula, as she strove to soothe and console her. Then I went down, my book in my hand, and waited for her coming. She entered the room with the look on her face that I was prepared to see—the look that had not rested there for many years. I met her outstretched hands, and answered the look, and then she dropped by my side, and hid her face.

"Is she asleep?" I asked her.

"Yes, Lewis. Her little voice is ringing in my ears now. Such a little, innocent voice to utter words like those! Lewis, Lewis! what does it mean?"

"She has learned from Kate Lethby the words she used. The idea is new to her, and she caught it at once, like a child. That is all."

"Ay, but it is *not* all, Lewis; it is not all. It seemed as if the thought had been sleeping in her mind long before now. It is not newly born; it is only awakened. And I, I must crush it back. I could do no more than strike it away from her. And she cried as she never cried before in all her life. Her tears rent my heart."

"I know; I can guess, Paula."

"You cannot; it is not in a man's soul to tell the agony of mine. I am her mother, and I have stabbed her with her first grief! Never in all her little life before, has she shed tears like those."

"It is a good sign. It renews our hopes," I said, with resolved cheerfulness. But my wife turned from me in bitterness.

"What hopes? Oh, Lewis! is it not mockery in us to desire so earnestly for our child the strength and clearness of intellect that only bring doubt and misery to ourselves? Let her remain as she is—my innocent, trusting angel! She is wiser than we. Sometimes I believe in my inmost heart



that she *knows* more than we—that her helpless, childish trust is nearer the truth than all our doubts.”

“That is not reasonable, Paula,” I said.

“Away with this cold logic!” she returned, almost fiercely; “it speaks to my ears, and not to my soul. Lewis, I cannot choose but cling to my little one’s sweet hands; they draw me towards her, no less in spirit than in body. *She* is holy, and pure, and true. What am I, that I dare to dispute against her instincts? Let me follow her.”

“I would not prevent you if I could,” I answered, sadly. “If you *can* believe, Paula, happiest for you.”

“You say so?” she said, in an awed tone, looking into my face.

“Even *I* say so. Yes, I have not ceased to be a sceptic, Paula, but I no longer exult in my scepticism. As men grow older, I suppose it is so. Doubt, after all, may be a harder tyrant than belief. If will could bestow on me a creed, I should be no unbeliever now; but reason is strong, and will not bend. *I cannot, I cannot——.*”

Paula drew closer to me in silence as I abruptly broke off. There was a long pause before I spoke again.

“If it be possible for you to go out of the cold shadow that I am prisoned in—go, Paula. It would make me happier to see you in the sunshine. Forgive me; I know I have kept you from it hitherto. I did my share of the work.”

“No, no, no!” she cried, vehemently. “Husband, husband! I will not have you say so; I will not have you reproach yourself. It is my own hard, stubborn heart that held me back always, that holds me back now. Not you, not *you*.”

She melted into passionate tears, and we said no more.

It was the next day to this—a bright July day—I went early to London on my usual business. I said nothing to Paula about the child, nor did I ask if she was to go again to little Kate. Wish was her own quiet, noiseless self again that morning. She sat in her customary place, at that side of the table whence she could look out through the window on to the garden. Her clear eye seldom left that outlook, and I fancied her face brightened momentarily, in the glory of the sunshine that was flooding earth and sky so graciously.

Her little footsteps followed me down the garden path; her

little hand detained me at the gate. She lifted her face with the familiar gesture, and as I bent down to take her in my arms and kiss her, she said,—

“Wish is glad—so glad.”

“Why is she glad?”

“I don't know.” And the yearning rose from the deeps of her eyes. She looked round her searchingly at radiant flowers, trees, and sky, as if seeking the mystery of their brightness, then flung her arms round my neck, and nestled her head in my bosom. “Wish is glad,” she said again.

What moved the child to this gladness, or to utter it in words on that special morning? Shall I ever know?

The remembrance of her sweet look, the feeling of her dear arms round my neck, sunk down into my heart. I forgot nothing of the brief episode during all the day. It followed me into my usual avocations; it made the time beautiful to me. As I went home at evening I thought of it. It was a thought in harmony with the ineffable purity of joyousness that seemed to pervade the world that evening. Clear and rosy shone the western sky, though the sun wanted half an hour to its setting—richly sounded the blackbird's song, and the green fields and the sloping hill beyond, with its broidery of woodland, and its crown—the old grey church tower and quaint wooden spire rising from it—all seemed to me *lustrous* that evening, as if the air around were something more than air, and illumined all that was beheld through it.

So I thought as I turned down the green lane leading to our cottage; as I walked along the garden path where Wish's footsteps had followed me that morning. I entered at the open door and passed into the general sitting-room. No one was there; but Paula's needlework was scattered on the table, and a bunch of flowers, arranged as Wish loved to arrange them, lay on the window-sill. I took them up, gratefully inhaling their fresh fragrance, while looking out anew on the radiant hill, and the western sky, where the sun was partially covered, and seemed trying to burst free from a long line of dappled clouds. So I stood in the recess of the bow window for some time, till the rustle of a robe sounded in the room, and Paula's hand was laid upon my arm, and Paula's voice:—

“Husband! Wish is ill—very ill.”

I do not know what I said, or how she looked. I only remember the sudden horror of the shock, the heavy weight that fell on my heart, crushing all quiet thoughts away. I remember, too, that the sun had burst through the detaining clouds, and shone round and golden, while the level light, intense and absolute, glorified the landscape that had seemed bright before.

It was strange, and yet *not* strange, that both Paula and I, from the first, had the same dim, breathless terror of this illness that had suddenly smitten the child. She had drooped and sickened all within a few hours, they told me. At first, Dr. Lethby himself was perplexed by the singular nature of the attack; but ultimately it resolved itself into one of those dread fevers, so subtle, and sometimes so fatal. Sometimes—only sometimes! I said this to myself day after day, trying to keep up the show of hope. But I was a hypocrite. Through the long hours that I watched by the little bed, where our darling tossed in restless delirium, though I watched as eagerly, as jealously, as if, by the keenness of my vision, I could fence off all ill that could come near her:—still—I *knew*.

On the ninth day, exhausted, I had been compelled by Dr. Lethby to leave the sick room for a space. I fell into a heavy, torpid sleep, from which I was aroused by a voice. “Come,” it said, “at once. The child is sinking. Nerve yourself for your wife’s sake. She suffers more than you can do.”

And I rose and staggered to my feet, like one in a dream, and followed him. \* \* \* I could not bear it. I could not bear to see the tiny figure, with its lily face and closed eyes, lying there. All my manhood forsook me. I flung myself by the bedside, and burst into a passion of despair.

A hand took mine and pressed it. Paula had stolen to my side; Paula’s voice spoke to me.

“Hush, husband!” Only those two words, but in such a tone! Calm, comforting, tender. I looked up at her—her face wore the same expression as her voice.

“Is there hope, then?” I said, in a harsh whisper; and they told me there was none! “Paula, *can* she live?”

"No. Oh, be still, for her moments are very few; and she can hear you."

She was again hanging over the child, watching every quiver of her little face, listening to every faint breath that came and went.

Presently the eyelids trembled and unclosed. The wide blue eyes sought the mother's face, and rested there, content. A smile parted the pale lips, and she seemed to try to speak.

"Mamma."

She laid her head beside her, so as better to hear the feeble utterance.

"The pain's gone."

"Yes, my darling. Oh, my child. my child!" The agony would have way for the minute. The little head turned restlessly on its pillow.

"Is mamma sorry?"

"No—no—no. Mamma is content."

There was a long silence. Then again the weak, tremulous, tiny voice:—

"Where are you, mamma and papa?"

We each took one small hand.

"Why can't I see you? Why are you so far off?"

Paula slid her arm under the dear head, and held her so. The slender breath grew short and fast. Dr. Lethby drew near—looked for a minute—then left us, softly.

"Mamma—papa!" We detected the faint whisper, and bent down very close, that we might lose nothing of the fragile sound. "Come, too. Come with Wish."

And that was all. The lips ceased to be stirred, even by the fluttering breath. A slight spasm convulsed her face for a moment, and then left it settled in that pure, peaceful likeness we were to know it by, evermore.

We leaned over her, dumbly. I felt as if in a dream. I could not realise, I could not believe in anything that I saw. Wish lying there, with that white, soft smile on her face, was not real, and still less was Paula, sitting without word or sign, gazing down on the dead face with her steadfast eyes. It was in an instinctive effort to break the circle of illusion which surrounded me that I called on her name.

She roused then, and looked up. The anguish seemed to

surge over her face in a gradual wave of consciousness. It broke, with a forlorn wandering of the eyes, a beseeching gesture of the outstretched arms, and a low, long, desolate wail.

"My darling—my treasure. Oh, my child—my child—my child!"

I sat there, mute, and watched her agony. I dared not go near it. I was stonelike and helpless. I felt as if all my world had slipped by me—floated away irretrievably into an unknown vortex, while I stood watching, as now, with my hands bound to my side and my utterance choked, even from lamentations.

My last remembrance was of Paula coming to me, touching my forehead with her hands. Then everything was blotted out from eyes and mind.

\* \* \* \*

I had been a strong man, vigorous in health, as I was held to be in intellect. But in that long illness I seemed to be drained of life, both mental and physical, till only the dregs of both remained. Then there followed a long period of convalescence, during which all I could do was to lie quietly where they placed me, sometimes with closed lids and heavy listless thoughts vaguely traversing my mind; sometimes with my eyes wandering restlessly about the room, till they lit on Paula's patient face, whereon they would linger. About that face my thoughts grew entangled often. I could not rightly order them. A misty consciousness, a painful yearning after something forgotten, continually led me into a maze of ideas, so imperfectly comprehended, that I felt more than ever weak and helpless in the midst.

At length, one day, a very little thing broke the spell that kept my mind so tightly in its bonds. Some flowers were brought and laid beside me. Their delicate fragrance seemed to steal into my very inmost heart. Among them were one or two sprays of white jasmine, with their peculiar aromatic odour. On the wings of that subtle essence, recollection came to me, and renewed consciousness. These were favourite flowers of our Wish; they had been among those—the last gathered by her hands—that I had carelessly taken up that evening—a whole life since!—and distinctly, to every smallest detail of "that evening" I remembered. I saw the



radiant hill and the rosy sunset, the aspect the room had worn, and the look on Paula's face when she came in to tell me that Wish was ill. Then came the long, blurred, hazy memory of the ensuing days, scarcely of anxiety—that were too hopeful a name for the feeling with which we hungrily watched every breath our darling drew—every change on her face—every stirring of her limbs—through that terrible time.

From these remembrances I lifted my eyes, and read their sequel in Paula's face. Yet was there still something in that shadowed face which I could not understand. Involuntarily my thought took words. "How changed!" I said. And again in my mind I commenced groping about for some new revelation which should make things clearer to me. But at the sound of my voice, Paula came and stooped beside me, looking earnestly into my face, as if she were startled to hear me speak. Her own voice trembled as she asked me, "What was changed?" She was afraid lest my answer should betray that I was still not myself, for—poor wife!—I had been utterly bereft of sense for many weeks. "You are changed, Paula," I said; "is this a new world?"

"Ay—it is—it is!" she answered me; and she put her arms round me, and wept abundantly.

By and by, as she gradually told me the history of all those past seven weeks, I began to look in wonderment into her face, wherein I could detect no traces of the old stony desperation that had been wont to come there when danger was near those she loved. For hers was a nature that could bear bravely, endure cheerfully, many troubles that most women would shrink from; but when anxiety or sorrow really touched her, it did more than afflict, it *tortured* her. All this slowly recurred to me with vividness, as I lay on my sofa, holding her hand fast, and watching the outline of the pale, beautiful face that was slightly averted from me. She was looking at the landscape which was stretched out before the window. It was early autumn now; I knew the look of the trees in the garden, of the copse on the slope of the hill. *The hill*—I remembered it. Cruelly, relentlessly bright it looked now in the soft sunshine. After a little while I hid my face from it.

"What month is this?" I asked her.

She told me, September. I paused to think; and she divined my thought, and prevented the question that hovered on my lips.

"It was the first week in August that our darling went," said she, softly. "And then," she presently added, in the same hushed tone, "*you* left me, too. I thought I had lost both."

"How did you bear it, Paula?" I cried, hastily. "Why did your heart not break? Why was I the one to fail, and fall helpless at this time?"

"A year ago," said Paula, "I should have fallen helpless, too, Lewis. No human strength—no merely *human* fortitude is capable of enduring such woe as ours." She stopped abruptly—then added in a strange tone, low but distinct, and with a tremulous quiver vibrating through every word—"But I—I was not comfortless."

I looked at her in silence.

"Lewis," she whispered again, "I was not comfortless." A pause. "No," she went on, slowly—and now her voice rose, steady and clear, like the light that gathered and brightened in her eyes—"a mother who has seen her child die, is still *not* comfortless. For no mother who has lost her child can *doubt*. Lewis, do you understand me? God is good," she cried, passionately, "and in his mercy he ordered it so, that to a bereaved mother's soul *must* come the conviction that is more than knowledge—the faith that is worlds above all reasoning. I *know* that I shall have my child again! Lewis—Lewis—I *know* it!"

She sank down beside me; and again the soft rain of tears fell plenteously. When women weep so, it is well with them. \* \* \* And I lay still and thought.

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It was well with Paula, I could see that. To see it steadied me, strengthened me infinitely. Ay; even though that Revelation which at length her bruised and chastened spirit had been made capable of receiving—was still to me as something speaking in a strange language which I *could* not learn. And so it was with me for very long. The feeling of that long convalescence was a very new one. It might well be so, for the clear head, the vigorous brain, I had had a



man's pride in possessing, had passed from me for ever; and, during those months of slow recovery to bodily strength, I had to grow accustomed to the truth. Mental strength would never be mine again. All my capacities were bounded now by but a narrow circle. The profound thought, the complicated reasoning, that had been easy to me as pastime, I could pursue no longer.

The affliction fell heavily upon me—perhaps the smaller cares it involved, helped to nerve us both to endurance. My vocation was gone, and with it our means of living, save the small sum that yearly accrued to Paula. It was enough to save us from absolute want; but my condition, the doctors said, necessitated many luxuries, and to gain money for these, Paula worked hard. Not writing; the time for that was past. She had lived too much, perhaps, to be able to put life on paper as she had done years before. Imagination had been set aside by vital, engrossing reality, for so long, that it could not now resume its functions as of old. But she was more than content to teach the few little children that came to her every morning. Intercourse with children, indeed, grew to be one great solace of her life.

The other—yes, I think I was a solace to her, even when I myself was most hopeless.

And years passed on. Comparative wealth came to us then; but Paula for a long while continued her labour of love among the little children.

We grew old together. It is not long since she left me. I have been very lonely since then; but not—as she said once—not comfortless.

Yet, though I am no sceptic now, I do not hope ever to attain to the clear faith, the loving trust, that shed such peace over the last years of Paula's life. I am humbled—I feel abased to the very dust, when I feel myself in my weakness and feebleness, clinging for my sole hope to those truths which in my proud, strong days I rejected and contemned.

Thus—not in despair, yet rejoicing with trembling—I wait.

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It has helped to wear away this time of waiting to write this history for you, my true and kind friend. You knew me

when the world applauded me as strong and great ; and when it compassionated my weakness and my ruined prospects. And I think you who, seeing deeper than the world, saw through both the strength and the weakness, will find the lesson that I know these pages must convey.

So, farewell.

## FOUR SISTERS.

## PART I.

I AM a woman some years past thirty, and unmarried; you know, therefore, to what class I belong. If I do not like the generic term, "old maid," still less am I ashamed of it, although conventionalism has attached thereto its own interpretation, often bravely belied by us. I say often—not always. An army, however valorous in the aggregate, may yet number a few skulkers and cowards; the most virtuous of communities is seldom altogether exempt from the vicious; and so, some old maids love gossip, and some are vain and coquettish long after the era when those qualities are looked on indulgently, by a world ever lenient to youth. Some, like Miss Bridget Sting, are mischief-makers, and some put on severity of judgment with their first "front," and their failure in charity keeps pace with the gradual departure of their good looks. Be this confessed; even they, the black sheep of the flock, should, by their very faults and bitternesses, form subject not for sarcasm and blame, but for pity.

Consider,—if *you* feel so keenly the discomfort of intercourse with Miss Bridget Sting, or Miss Letitia Macpry—if your mental vision smarts with being brought to bear on that infinitesimal which only is contained within their horizon—if your more generous soul feels wounded by the contact with the hard, ungenial, and unforgiving—if your own sense of beauty and goodness grows dim while remaining, ever so briefly, in a world which recognises them not—even as a man might half forget the sunshine, in talking to the blind—if, in a word, *you* feel the misery of transient intercourse with these minds—consider how much more miserable are they who own the minds and cannot get away from them. Never forget that they who are most disagreeable to the

world, are hateful to none so much as to themselves; and this in spite of the kind robe of vanity which ever lends itself so graciously where it is most needed. There are moments of inspiration to other than poets, when man sees himself as he is, not as he seems, and something of the lost angel in him looks down on the human, with clear, keen, awful eyes. In such moments God have pity on the vile, as on the weak and the erring! How many of us, do you think, stand beyond the reach of that divine compassion vouchsafed to those three conditions of men?

You, bright-faced, bright-hearted girl, in all the unconscious (yet none the less tyrannical) pride of your grace and beauty, your eighteen summers, your clear young brain, and fresh untroubled mind—look not with unsoftening gaze at the Miss Bridgets of your acquaintance; bear with their ill-nature and their bad humour; you can afford to be indulgent. Out of the same mine come diamonds and flints. It would be an ungrateful diamond that would not have patience with the dulness and unloveliness of the commoner stone.

If you tire of all this, and call it sermonising, at least confess it to be disinterested. You may believe me when I tell you that I am not a Miss Bridget, any more than I am a beautiful girl of eighteen. Eighteen years ago I *was* eighteen; but never, since I entered this breathing world, have I been beautiful. I think I have a right to demand that this gratuitous avowal be accepted as guarantee for my perfect sincerity and candour in all that follows. The instinct of truth must be strong indeed, in the woman of six-and-thirty who voluntarily resigns that dear vested interest in the past—the privilege of talking about her bygone good looks. You do not very often meet with a woman of middle age, plain howsoever she may be, who does not occasionally revert to her youth with a half-simpering assertion, equally singular and incontrovertible, “Ah, I was a handsome girl in those days!”

No one ever thought me handsome—not even my mother. To be sure, she would stroke my straight tresses of pale brown hair, and look into my very ordinary grey eyes, and murmur as if to herself: “My Ella is better than handsome.” But you may take it for granted that a “better”

does not enter into a woman's ideas, till the beauty of her child is found to be unmistakably mythical.

We were a plain family, I think, on the whole. My two elder sisters had but slightly the advantage of me on the score of personal attraction; but they were of gayer and lighter temperament, and at twenty years of age had more self-possession and *aplomb*, than I have ever attained to this day. They were stylish girls; tasteful in their dress, easy in their manner; they sang prettily, talked cleverly, were quick of comprehension, and apt at repartee. I remember well with what a sense of contrast, association with them used to strike me. In the mornings they chanced to spend at home, they used to be delicately clad in rustling silk, with lace frills falling softly and fairly over white and well-cared-for hands, with chains flashing and jingling on their wrists and round their necks, and a vague but sweet and refined perfume pervading their whole presence. I, in my plain high dress of sober-coloured stuff, seated in a remote corner of the room, with my books, or desk, or drawing materials, would sometimes find my thoughts and my looks wander from even their mute and well-loved companionship, to my graceful young lady sisters, as they trifled away the hours, in lounging over an embroidery-frame, chatting to morning visitors, or trying new songs at the piano.

Our lives were different enough, though we were children of the same parents, and dwelt under one roof. But when a change came, it fell the hardest upon them. Severe losses in business compelled reduction in the family expenditure. Our father, without being bankrupt, was known to be "in embarrassed circumstances;" and, I believe, a sort of black mark was straightway affixed to the name of Gordon on the visiting-lists of most of our acquaintance.

My poor sisters! they drooped visibly in the absence of that fashionable glitter and radiance which form the sunshine of London life. In our third-rate house, with its comfortable but homely appointments, they seemed out of place and ill at ease; from that, they gradually sunk into a sullen, and, truth to tell, a somewhat slovenly resignation to their altered position. Harriet was seven-and-twenty; and when she began to grow careless of her person, commenced, at that

late period, to pay some attention to mental adornments. She borrowed my books, and went doggedly through a most heterogeneous course of reading, during which she took elaborate notes, in blue ink, on quires of foolscap paper. •I think there must be something of the delirium of the tarantula, in the contact of pen and ink. Some natures would seem to be so constituted, that if they once begin to write they *must* go on till they die. From scribbling extracts and quotations, Harriet proceeded to writing with original intentions—essays, moral and didactic; narratives, domestic, romantic, or otherwise; in fact, she entered on the whole mechanical routine of authorship. Her finger-ends wore a permanent illustration of ink; her costume became at every change more eccentric in fashion, and more dingy in hue; her hair, ill brushed at the hasty morning toilet, was seldom re-adjusted for the rest of the day. She was, finally, a thorough example of the amateur authoress.

Alicia was two years younger, and had a better complexion. It was to be noted that at her utmost point of despondency she still curled her hair, and that her *négligée* was always of a becoming colour. And if she was fretful and peevish in the candour and undisguise of her family circle, she was still sweetly spoken, and with manners of the pleasantest, in the limited society now attainable by her. Nevertheless, she was rapidly becoming cynical; and at home, her smiles invariably curved into sneers before they left her lip—when, happy chance! one of our olden acquaintances who was reputed good-natured, and was not too idle to act up to the character, gave Alicia an invitation to accompany her to one of the German baths. Poor Alicia! How amiable she became under the influence of this brightening in her prospects! How all her old liveliness returned, almost simultaneously, as it seemed, with the donning of a new silk morning-dress, such as she had used to wear in the days of her former smiles and gay humour! Scores of times, from the midst of my quiet, unnoticed observance of all around me, I had felt a hearty dislike and scorn of that broken-down fine lady, my sister Alicia. Her airs and graces in public, her crossness and ill-humour at home, stirred my wrath to a degree that might have become demonstrative in a less self-contained



nature than my own. Hypocrisy, in all its gradations, whether in small or great matters, or in subdued or overweening proportions, was entirely and unmitigatedly my abhorrence, because *my* faults ran entirely in an opposite direction; and I, like all the young, and alas! many of the old, had no charity for vices towards which I had no leaning.

Yet my conscience stung me somewhat, when Alicia departed, her face tearful and overshadowed, spite of her approaching pleasures, by the grief her really affectionate nature felt at the separation from us all.

"It is not only leaving you," I heard her say to mamma, amid sobs; "but to leave you *thus*. And to be going to enjoy myself—to live again in the old luxury and elegance—while ——."

And her eyes wandered expressively over the plainly-furnished room, with its curtains and carpet of economically dismal hue, and its chairs and tables strong and ugly, like all articles of the serviceable kind in England, where taste and costliness are inseparable.

I had never supposed Alicia capable of such feeling as she evinced. Because her failings had been unusually apparent, I had forgotten to give her credit for possible good qualities under the surface. Verily, if charity covers a multitude of sins, prejudice covers a no less number of virtues!

A mist is over my memory of the few months following. My mother died. Mine was not an affectionate nature, in the ordinary sense of the term; my heart took but few into its depths: up to that time, my twenty-third year, I had never loved any one, *except* my mother,—and she died that year.

I was ill for a long time after that. One of the first things I remember, was waking from a deep sleep, and staring wonderingly at the figure of my eldest sister Harriet, who was standing at the fire, leaning over, and stirring some preparation for me, dressed in her brown wrapper, with her fingers as usual daubed with ink, and a pen yet held between her lips. The authoress had turned nurse. And, by her side, holding some articles incidental to the cookery going forward, stood my youngest sister and pupil, her vivacious face softened down into a most strange gravity and demureness.



She was six years my junior, that child, and I had had the conduct of her education ever since she had been old enough to be put to learn anything. Observe, *put* to learn—as for learning, it seemed a matter of impossibility with her, except in eccentric and most fitful fashion, scarcely deserving the decorous name. Not the least of those cares and vexations I had for years kept carefully within my own breast, were the daily lessons to my wilful sister Grace. As usual, I had closed my eyes to all save her wilfulness and selfishness; or, at least, if I was aware that she possessed some better characteristics, I never took much notice of what, it must be owned, I seldom received any benefit from. To her elder sister and governess her spoiled-child qualities came out in full force. There had been moments when I almost hated her.

Down crashed spoon and basin from her heedless hands, when, turning round, she beheld me with open eyes quietly regarding her; and then she ran to me, threw her arms around me, pressed her face to mine, and cried heartily; while even Harriet's lips unclosed—dropping the pen inkily on the white bed—in a thankful ejaculation. I marvelled at their emotion; nor did I deem the mystery explained even when Grace said, with a fresh embrace—sudden, and rough, and girlish:—

“The doctor said you would—you would—never get well, if you didn't amend to-day. O Ella!”

And Harriet's eyes were wet, I noticed, as she stood gazing on me.

I pondered on it all, in the abundant leisure of convalescence, and I emerged on the new life of renewed health with other, and even greater blessings renewed in me. A kind and forbearing affection I learned to entertain for all those about me, and one I took into my heart—Little Grace. “Little,” I call her, from habit, or perhaps because there is something strangely endearing in the term. Actually she was not so. I was struck with her tallness—her womanliness—when I returned home, after an absence of three months in the country, where I had been staying to get strong.

It was a happy sojourn. I made two new friends, and that

friendship commenced a new era for me. I was scarcely the same woman who had for years passed sullenly, if blamelessly, through the routine of family life, when I returned to that life, one hot September afternoon—dreariest, dustiest of seasons in London streets—with the vivid impression resting on my mind of the golden, glowing calm I had left behind me.

I was *not* the same. They all recognised the change—Grace in a remark which was but equivocally complimentary:—

“I shouldn’t have known you, Ella—you look’ so well. Quite pretty—or, at least, almost,” she added, in a sudden access of conscientiousness.

There was no need for such a reservation in her own case. Harmony of expression, and movement, and colour, did their very best, in Grace, to make amends for the want of perfect symmetry in feature which was too plainly visible in her sisters. Grace was attractive even to a casual observer; I, who loved her, thought her lovely.

I had always regarded her as a child hitherto; but the brook had fairly expanded into the river now. She had been to her first ball; she was full of the new ideas and impressions thus given her, and she prattled them forth, for my edification, with an ingenuousness of detail thoroughly girlish. I nodded and smiled in the right places; while the chatter reached my ears in a confused murmur of “muslin, roses, fan, partners, compliments, engaged six deep, after supper, waltzing;” till at last it settled down on a name—and then came a pause—“Captain Royston.”

Looking up, I saw the prettiest blush on my sister’s face. I can understand now, how greatly I disappointed her by turning away in silence, and stooping over an unpacked bandbox, in order to give her time to recover herself. The chatter ceased, blankly; and when I obliged myself to speak, a few minutes after, it was, I thought, on a subject at a safe distance from captains.

“It is so fair and quiet a country around Byford,” said I; “I wish you could have been there. Fancy a place where there are more thrushes than men and women; and where, in the woods, the hares ———.”

“Was your society composed of thrushes and hares, then?”

inquired Grace, with a saucy laugh. "Don't wish *me* there, if it was: I'm not tired of my fellow-creatures yet. What sort of people are the Byfordians? You mentioned a Mr. and Miss Keith. Are they aborigines, or visitors?"

I did not feel angry with her flippancy; only ashamed, as I told her, quietly, and, it proved, convincingly. She came to my side with a new and sweet seriousness in her face, and played with my neck-ribbon, while she repeated her inquiry, thus:—

"But are they nice people? Now, do you tell me about Mr. Keith and his sister Ellinor—and—I'll tell you about Captain Royston."

I did not understand sufficiently to feel amused; but I was a little surprised, and hesitated in my reply long enough for her to begin with her narration: and *that* was long enough to last all the time we were alone, that day and the next, and many days succeeding. There was no occasion for my description of my friends: it was never again requested; and I, ever a better listener than talker, was not displeased thereat.

For it *was* a duty to the child to draw out the thoughts that else would have lain brooding in her mind; ceasing to be innocent when they ceased to be so frankly revealed. As it was, the girlish fancy, made up of gratified vanity and artless liking, that she had entertained for her first admirer, evaporated in the very talking of it; and when the hero joined his regiment, and Grace had looked her last on him, she came and nestled in my lap, saying, between laughing and crying, "He is very handsome and agreeable; but I don't care. He is gone, and I sha'n't have him to talk about any more." And a sigh ended it; and so closed the era of frivolous young-ladyism in my little sister.

After that, my love for her, and hers for me, grew to be one of the great blessings of my life. We were constant companions; and oftentimes whole days were spent by us two alone, except when the stated meal-times assembled the family in the common sitting-room.

Oh, those long mornings, in the close dingy rodm, with its atmosphere of dust, and its prospect from the windows of the decorous and sober vegetation proper to the garden of a London

square ! The sunshine glinting in sometimes, and quivering on the floor, made my heart leap with a strong pang, swiftly banished by a stronger will. There we sat, Grace and I—Harriet being at her writing in her own room, and my father gone out to business for the day—and there, while our fingers were industriously employed with needlework, Grace talked, and I listened. Sometimes, I admit, her chatter slipped from me, and I heard other words, other speech than hers ; but her remonstrance—“ *Ella, do attend !* ”—was sufficient to recall me, penitent, and with freshly quickened ears, to my duty.

It was a dull life for poor Grace, with her youthful instincts fresh and unsatisfied, and all the keener because checked by circumstances. It saddened me, it lay heavy on me to see her bright face lose its more exquisite radiance, under the shadowy influence of the gloomy London home, and the continued depression of the family atmosphere. Harriet was now always taciturn, severe, and inky ; my father, tried sorely by his hard struggle with the world in his old age, was morose, and even unkind, at seasons of especial irritability.

Letters received from Alicia were full of descriptions of the gaieties of Rome, where she and her patroness were staying. Her patroness, I say ; for since Alicia returned to her, after a brief sojourn at home during my mother's last illness, she had avowedly taken upon herself the position of dependent on her friend Mrs. Cleveland.

“ She seems to be very happy,” said Grace, in a subdued tone, as she refolded a letter from Rome one morning. “ Don't you think so, Ella ? ”

I assented briefly.

“ I don't wonder,” pursued she, musingly ; “ she has everything she can wish. Life is made pleasant to her. Not that I would be in her place,” she added, with sudden animation ; “ I should not be happy if I were. But sometimes I wish that my happiness grew more within my reach ; that I could be content with gathering from the lower branches, as other people do.”

“ On the lower branches hangs fruit that the sun never touched,” answered I, more sententiously than was my wont. “ It is wholesomest to starve, Grace.”

We were both silent for awhile. My own thoughts were

distant enough, when Grace recalled them to herself, by breathing a half-stifled but very lingering sigh.

I looked up anxiously, and met her close fond kiss and twining arms round my neck. I detected her innocent *ruse* to hide the tears she thought would grieve me.

"A holy doctrine yours, dear," she said presently. "I'll try and learn it; but Famine looks an ugly angel at first to clasp to one's breast."

I knew it—I knew it; and a great pang struck through me as I silently gazed on the young face, on the drooped lids and quivering mouth. It was not the countenance of one fitted to bear patiently the aching pain of a life-long want. It was so different a face from that I sometimes pondered over, half curiously, half mournfully: *my own*, with its placid eyes and mouth, in which all sensitiveness was curbed with an iron, cruel, inexorable strength, all necessary to the task.

That was a curious day; I remember it distinctly, emphatically, as I would remember the last page of one volume of a book. There is always a significance about *the last*.

## PART II.

ONE evening, our quiet family circle was astonished by the advent of a visitor. Mr. Keith came. He was in London on business. He brought me a bunch of flowers from his sister, plucked in the sunny garden I remembered very well, belonging to their house at Byford. My father received him with a degree of courtesy and cordiality unusual to him of late years; but he had known Mr. Keith's family, it seemed; and, of course, Byford and its neighbourhood and people were familiar enough to him; and he seemed pleased to converse on these topics, so long strange to his lips. Moreover, this was not one of the *young* men for whom my father entertained such a virulent and contemptuous dislike. Mr. Keith was past even a man's youth—that period which extends so



indefinitely over the fifth, the sixth, or the seventh lustre of his life. Mr. Keith was nearly forty; he was thoughtful, intelligent, well informed on matters interesting to the old man of business, and could talk wisely and well on those subjects—as, indeed, he did on everything his clear brain and well-balanced mind were directed to. I had seldom seen my father so animated, so evidently well pleased; and even Harriet put away her desk, and joined in the conversation, with an occasional remark or question.

Grace, meanwhile——. She wore a dress of deep, rich, ruby-coloured merino, high up and jealously closed about the milkwhite throat. The throat, so pure, so slender, so pensile—like the stem of a hyacinth, and the dainty head set so fairly on it, and bent over some work she was doing. The sweet serious profile—straight brow, delicate nose, and the rippling, wavy line of the mouth. Then for colour—nut-brown hair, and eyelashes so dark, that the hazel eyes were almost black in their shadow; and red lips, and a flush on the cheeks, such as we see sometimes on a sunset cloud. She was like that. I can only set down, prosily catalogue what I saw. If I were a painter I could make you look on her, and love her. You could not help it—I know that quite well—I always knew it. I knew that Mr. Keith saw her—watched her; his eyes lingered about her; and once, when he spoke to her, his voice took quite a new tone, as if he had been speaking to a little child he was very tender over.

Now, I saw all this; also I saw that Grace—Grace was, somehow, not quite herself this evening. Her mouth was tremulous; the very flush on her cheek seemed to flicker, as if a light, vivid but fluctuating, were playing about it; and she kept her head so drooped, I did not once see into her eyes, till—till Mr. Keith was gone. Then I looked at her, just once, before I ran upstairs to my own room—to write letters.

Well, after that evening, Mr. Keith was rather a frequent guest at our house. He was to remain in London a month or six weeks. I used to wonder what the last week of those six would be like, and what the next, when he was gone. I used to laugh to myself; for, you see, I *knew* very well he wouldn't go—he couldn't—at least until things were altered.

My sister Grace did not talk much with me at this period. We were together as usual; but the propinquity was little more than merely physical. She sat thinking, on her little stool beside the window; I sat thinking, leaning back in the great chair, in a recess of the room. I came out of my thoughts sometimes, though; and it was an odd feeling to look at her face, wherein that sunset flush was *ever* quivering. It seemed to me never to have left it since that evening. And I could feel how cold *my* cheek was, and how tightly strained my lips. Who would have thought us sisters? We must have looked very different.

He said so, indeed, one day. Grace had left the room for a minute; he turned to me, the look yet softening his eyes with which he had been watching her.

"You told me about your sister Grace at Byford—one day especially, when we were walking through the wood, after the rain. Do you remember?"

"Grange Wood? Perfectly."

"Yes"—in a musing, absent tone. "But I did not think—I did not expect, from your description——. I imagined something very different."

"It is difficult to describe her."

"Do you think so?" He smiled quietly, as to himself; he rose from his chair, and slowly walked to the window.

"She is not like any of you," he presently said.

"No. She is the only one who resembles my mother. The rest of us"—I grew bitter over these dividing, separating words—"have a family likeness to each other. Harriet, Alicia, and myself, are unmistakable Gordons."

"Ah!" A long-drawn, subdued, half-sighing murmur reached my ears. Then there was a pause—till he faced me, quickly and suddenly, with the words: "Do you know that Ellinor looks forward to seeing you as her guest at Byford this summer?"

"Does she so? It is very good of her."

My coolness was all unnoticed; he was not thinking of *me*.

"And—do not you think it would be pleasant to *her*, as it certainly would to every one else, if your sister could be persuaded to accompany you? How she would enjoy our Sussex woods, and Ellinor's garden! I fancy I can see her running



about the paths, and standing under the larch-tree upon the lawn."

Before he averted his head, I could see that his eyes were half closed, and his lip tremulous, as with some sweet, but sad emotion. I did not choose to puzzle over it, or about anything that appeared to me not altogether explicable in his words or in his manner. I was about to reply with some simple, straightforward sentence; but Grace re-entered the room, and our conversation ceased.

I think it was on the occasion of his next visit to us that he first mentioned the time of his departure from London: he would be going home in the ensuing week, he said. My father spoke out his regrets with cordial candour; even Harriet volunteered to be sorry in anticipation; for me, I remarked on the beauty of the country at this season of the year—we were early in the month of April—and envied him. I said, the first breath of sweet vital spring that would welcome him from aromatic woods and dewy fields, and banks clouded with violets.

Grace said not a word; but of late she had become habitually silent, especially in the family circle: that she was mute now, would awake no wonder in any one. I just glanced at her sufficiently to see that she was sitting self-possessed—serene to all appearance. No doubt Mr. Keith's eyes also were turned to that little chair beside the fire where she sat, with the work-basket lying near, and a litter of scissors and muslin, and gay-coloured worsteds on her lap. Howbeit, when next he spoke, it was with reference to his hope of seeing us all at Byford in the course of the summer. A vague and deprecatory rejoinder from my father appeared to modify his liberal idea, and he then suggested the plan he had already spoken of to me.

This met with a more favourable and kindly reception. The parental eye shone with more complacency, and he uttered a few words of acknowledgment unwontedly genial and courteous. Evidently he inclined to the notion of his Little Grace seeing the old scenes of his boyhood; and as it could be effected without incurring the necessity of his leaving his beloved London, there appeared no possible objection to the scheme.

I almost felt the glow that flashed up to Grace's cheek, and lightened in her eyes. I said nothing; and I do not well remember what was said by any one on the subject. I was thinking of that old house at Byford, with its quaint, ancient-fashioned garden, its sundial on the smooth-shaven lawn, and the long path leading between tall guelder roses, syringa, and sweet-briar, down which we used to walk at sunset-time so often. At the end of the alley a little wicket-gate led into the corn-fields; and whenever I thought of "the old house at Byford," I always saw the picture of that little gate, with its sentinels at either side—two tall young larches rising straightly—pencilled vividly against the radiance of the western sky; and beyond—the waving gold of the ripe corn sloping upwards till it seemed almost to join the quiet glory of the sunset.

But all this was of last summer; *now* it was necessary to think of the summer that was coming. Grace was thinking of it—thought of nothing else. I knew, all that evening—while he was there, and after he had gone. And I had been in my own room some little time, when a faint tap at the door was followed by the apparition of a slender figure, draped in white, her pretty hands holding the loose wrapper about her neck, and her rich brown hair hanging about, partially unfastened from its daytime restraint of ribbon, and net, and comb. It was a long time since she had burst in upon me in this guise—so long, that for a moment the sight of the familiar figure, entering in the old manner, smote me with a sudden feeling that something else must have altered, because it was so strange—it was so unnatural that *this* was as it used to be.

"Ella, I want to speak to you." The words left the tremulous lips swiftly, as if the constrained will half doubted its own power to maintain its purpose.

"Yes, dear."

Heaven knows I had no unloving, untender thought of *her*; yet, when I had spoken, I recognised how cold was the tone, how rigid the air with which I stood looking at her, before her appealing, faltering voice rebuked me.

"Ella, O Ella! Let me come to you. Don't, don't look away!"

She clung to me; she hid her face in my lap; she took my

hands and placed them about her own neck. I found myself sitting in the old, old way, leaning over her, caressing her, looking down at her, my darling, my little sister that I loved!

"Ella, I am afraid——." A long pause.

"Of what are you afraid, my child?"

"I cannot—I cannot tell you, what I came—~~to~~ say."

"You need not. I will tell *you*."

"No."

She raised her head and looked me in the face steadily. Oh, such a look in my little sister's eyes! I cried out in very anguish, it was so sudden, this revelation. She grew calm, in my passion. She soothed me, kissed me, her little hands stifled the first wild sobs which escaped from me. Presently I was quiet—I could sit and listen to her—and she began to speak, in a low, rapid, but decisive tone, neither of us looking at one another the while.

"After to-night, we will never speak of it again. But, Ella—sister—we—we are not *less* to each other than we were? We never shall be, never can be. Tell me?"

I thought I read all her meaning. Silently I took her to my heart, and held her there, feeling she was all that was *mine* in the world—mine, mine. She could not be any other's little sister, let her be what else she would.

"*Less* to each other!" she went on; "O no!" Her voice fell, died into a very low murmur, just audible, nothing more.

"That we are unhappy *together*, must surely bind us closer, in a dearer, tenderer sisterhood."

"What do you mean, Grace?" I cried in sudden apprehension. "Unhappy? and *together*? Child! in your happiness, mine will grow, ripen, and wax strong. The love that God sends to you for blessing you have no right to turn from, or to receive other than gratefully, praisefully. Take care of those wild, vain thoughts that I can see flashing about your eyes and quivering at your mouth. They are not good, nor wise, nor ——." But here, in spite of myself, some tearless sobs checked my voice for a moment.

I went on, however, while she hid her face in my breast. I spoke earnestly, vehemently, for a long time, till her agitation partially subsided, and she suffered me to raise her. She was flushed, unquiet still, I could see. After a minute's

effort to maintain composure, she gave way, flung her arms round my neck, crying:—

“ O Ella, Ella, I am weak—I am wicked. Forgive me—forgive me. I love him so much, I *cannot* give him up.”

To what self-torturing entreaties was this the passionate reply? I was silent for an instant. Before I could speak, the poor, strained little voice had burst forth again:—

“ I am miserable—I *must* be miserable. Oh, if I might only die, and be at rest!”

But before we slept that night, she had learned another prayer. And for me—I became very quiet in her passionate agitation. Everything grew clear to me. I felt sure he loved her—this little creature whose wild heart throbbed so tumultuously under the snow-folds of her robe, whose deep eyes swam in an unwonted lustre, who was thus convulsed from herself by this new, strange fate, which had fallen on her like a very avalanche.

Poor Grace! How disturbed was her sleep that night! She started up with stifled cries, and moved her arms restlessly, as if ever seeking to ward off some coming injury, and by the faint light left burning I could watch sometimes the slow tears gather under her white eyelids, and then force themselves down the soft, pale cheek. Yet she never quite awoke, but slept on, dreamed on, till nearly morning, when the unquiet, feverish symptoms left her: her face relaxed into a more natural, restful calm, and her low breath came and went slowly and regularly, as it had been used to do always, in her ordinary happy childlike sleep.

The next day passed strangely: Grace seemed languid, or else fitfully exerted herself to appear otherwise. One thing I noticed—that her eyes avoided mine with an instinctive, tremulous shyness that it touched me to see; and when I spoke to her, her face flushed with a glow something akin to the sunset light that two or three weeks ago had first brightened that delicate, beautiful cheek.

## PART III.

THAT day, and the next, and the next, went by. Mr. Keith did not come to see us; and it was a rare circumstance for three days to pass without a visit from him; besides, it was drawing near the time of his intended departure for home. Already it was Monday in the week "early in which" he had told us he should leave London.

Tuesday came. It made me feel unwontedly calm and steady, to note the painful nervousness of my sister. She started at every sound; her colour varied almost every minute; her hands trembled so that she could hardly guide the needle with which she was busied. It happened that it was some holiday in the city, and my father was at home that morning. After he had finished his newspaper he was at leisure to remark appearances around him, and he fixed his clear, piercing eyes upon poor Grace, in a sudden humour of investigation, which fell rather hardly upon her.

"Why, what is the matter with you? You're not well, Grace. Ella, do you observe your sister? Is she going to faint, or have the measles, or hooping-cough?"

"No, papa; she has had both those last disorders; and the first is not in her way at all. Is it, Grace?" said I, in desperate sportiveness.

"Something is wrong, though. I think you stoop too much over that flower-working nonsense, my dear. You look moped, and as if you had not quite enough air to breathe in. I should be really glad for you to take advantage of Mr. and Miss Keith's invitation, and go for a week or two to Byford. In the meantime, put on your bonnet, and we will go in an omnibus to one of the parks, and freshen you up a little."

To such a mandate as this, resistance would have appeared impossible to either of us; besides, I was well content that she should go; and I believe she was perfectly indifferent whether she stayed at home or went abroad, sat still or walked. So, presently, the two sallied forth.

Harriet was closeted in her own room, finishing an "article;" so I settled myself by the parlour window, with a task of needlework, from which I occasionally looked up to stare



vaguely, and but little regarding what I saw, through the dingy gauze blind, into the streets of London, sometimes brilliant, often gay, and even occasionally picturesque in its aspects, is never more cheerless, never more painfully and evidently "flat, stale, and unprofitable," than on a morning when spring sunshine glorifies the heavens and gladdens the earth, and the air is thrilled with that unspeakable joyfulness of buoyant new life that is like the first awakening of the year out of its winter bondage of cold and dreariness, its first glimpse of the bright Beyond into which it is destined to live. But what do we know of the spring who dwell in cities, among streets, where endless barriers of tall buildings intercept the free sunshine, and pestiferous vapours taint the air that comes from heaven so sweet and fresh; and in a proud, wealthy metropolis, moreover, where worldliness and conventionalism are perpetual vicegerents, seeking to tyrannise over the very hearts of their subjects, and doing their utmost to stifle all thoughts that are holy, all aspirations that are noble and pure?

I was thinking thus as I looked out into the street. The pavement glared with sunshine; the dark houses rose gloomily against the sky; half the genteel families of the neighbourhood were walking abroad, taking advantage of the "fine day" to go visiting or shopping. They passed under my window, in gay groups, chattering, murmuring, laughing; and the rustle of their dresses mingled with the distant street sounds that came distinctly through the clear air—the cries of itinerant green-grocers and fruit-women; and the tinkling of a bird-organ in the adjoining terrace, persistently keeping up its thin *staccato* to the rhythm of the *Lass o' Gowrie*.

I looked, and I heard, but I regarded but very little, for my thoughts were busy. My fingers mechanically moved about my work, but my eyes were bent fixedly on the window. I saw every passer-by, vaguely, and with indifference: I was as if out of the world, standing on the outer verge of what had been my life. With what a plunge I came back again! A quick, light step on the pavement, a figure passing under the window, and stopping at our door!—— I started from my seat, and then stood still in the middle of the room, feeling for a single minute a strange kind of incredulous alarm. Then I went to meet her—Ellinor Keith.



I remember the sad look of her brown eyes, and how her mouth trembled as she came towards me. I knew she was in trouble: I thought at once that her brother was ill; and I asked her if it was not so.

"No, not ill," she said; "but a great trial has come to him. I had to bring him the news yesterday, that some one he loves dearly is dangerously, hopelessly ill, at Naples. He started at once. He bade me come and tell you before I returned home. Yes—you need not say a word; I know you feel for him—for me too."

I did *not* say a word.

"It is so cruelly, cruelly hard!" she went on excitedly. "It has been all along so sad for him. Her father would not let them be engaged for two years; and the two years are within a month of completion. He expected them home at the end of May. Oh, what a cruel May it will be for him! My brother! my brother! If *I* could die instead."

I felt vaguely astonished at her passion, for she was usually a reserved, calm woman; but I tried to comfort her.

"Perhaps," said I, "she is not so fatally ill; perhaps she will not die."

"It is too slender a chance to hang by. She is ill of a malignant fever. If she is alive when he reaches her, it will be more than he dares hope."

"Of a malignant fever," I repeated.

"Even I cannot think of *his* safety just now; I cannot look forward; only, if he is ill, I shall go to him. He is all I have in the world, Ella."

"I know," said I; and I stood straight and silent, while she leaned her head down in her two hands, and sobbed strong, convulsive sobs. When these ceased, she rose up, took my hands, called me her dear friend, said it had comforted her to tell me all her grief; then, suddenly, she asked:—

"Where is Little Grace?"

I drew my hands away—ran to the window—and looked out.

"I expect her home soon; she is not well; she has gone out with my father for fresh air."

"Ay, you were both coming down to us, Gerard told me.

He told me a great deal of Grace: you know, she is so like his Lilian."

"Is she?"

"He says he loved looking at her, and watching her; she was, in her childish way, so like ——."

I don't know what I replied: my heart swelled, rebellious and bitter, and I had strongly to restrain the passionate reproach that was bursting for utterance. Ellinor said but little more, and then bade me good-by: she never noticed any difference in my manner, it was such a quiet manner always. Just as she left the door, something she said touched me, and I kissed her hastily, almost ashamed; she lingered then to say a few words:—

"Thanks, Ella. I know you love us both; and you, who know what sister-love is, may guess something of its pains, too."

Ay. It was true. I shut the door upon her, and went back into the room, to sit still and think, and try and get my thoughts quiet and in order, before—before I should see Grace.

I have thought sometimes that the power of suffering is, after all, limited, and its measure apportioned. "So far shalt thou feel, and no further." may be a divine ordinance; and often this uttermost power is taxed as much for a mere bruise, as for the wound that never heals, and that drains the source of life itself.

The week that followed that wild, weird spring morning, was not, I think, more full of pain than many had been before it. I do not remember details, but I retain an impression of my little sister during that time—the pitiful efforts she made to move about the house, and look, and talk, and laugh—more than was natural to her. And for the rest, all was dim, and there was no silence in my ears day or night; and outside the house, the sunshine glared hotly, and a feverish stupor seemed in the air.

Then came a letter from Ellinor Keith. Lilian was better, but he lay ill with the fever at Naples, whither his sister was on her way to join him.

All this time, Grace kept up in health and in all externals in a manner that to me, knowing her as I did, was marvellous.

Only when we were alone, the seemings slipped off for awhile ; and she would pass many hours in unmoveable silence, all her faculties seeming in a state almost of collapse. She hardly seemed to think or to feel at all ; and she sat with her eyes never lifted from her lap, and her face quite marble in its expressionless repose. I could not solve the mystery of my sister's mind, then ; I could only watch in a sort of dim anxiety, that was very hard to bear ; but I kept strong, and well, and vigorous. It was a great mercy ; though—may Heaven forgive me !—I did not feel it to be so in those heavy, dreadful days.

It was on one of those days that a packet arrived from Naples. It was directed to my father, in Mr. Keith's handwriting, and contained, besides his own letter to him, one to me, from Ellinor. The purport of both was to beg that we would take possession of their house at Byford for as long as we liked, as they would probably remain abroad for a year to come. Ellinor, in her note to me, said that her brother was quite himself again ; but Lilian—they feared the fever had left behind it a yet more insidious, fatal enemy. "It is too cruel a thought to speak of," she wrote ; "and I do not think he suspects yet, or he could not be so bright and hopeful as he is. You cannot imagine his love for her, Ella : you would hardly believe it or understand ——."

I crushed the letter. It was not till afterwards that I had time to feel dismayed at the new turn events seemed to be taking. My father strongly inclined to accept the offer of the house at Byford for the time they were to remain away. My faint remonstrance seemed only to confirm his desire ; and two evenings after, he asked me if we would be ready to travel the following week. Thus it was settled we were to go.

When I told Grace, she seemed to revive strangely at the idea, and she said she was glad. She liked the idea of living there, and seeing the places she had heard *me* speak of so often.

And so, one day in mid-June, our household left the drear London square ; and that chapter of life was closed up for ever.

Yes, that chapter of life was ended, for me ; the throes of passionate feeling, the spasms of sentimental affliction had

been suffered and endured, and the pitiful memory of them was all that remained. Existence grew too busy to permit much recurrence to them. Troubles came thick and fast; actual tangible difficulties had to be fought; and the warfare of the soul, the distresses of the heart, became, or I thought they became, of very secondary importance.

I was mistaken—they only slept, they did not die; yet in their sleep they lost much of their distinctive individuality. They awoke, not less real, but less monstrous. They took their fitting place; they assumed their actual proportions. I could recognise the truth, that even a woman, loving, clinging, parasitical as is her nature, possesses other faculties besides her affections, and other sentient, vital capacities of suffering, besides a heart. I think men and women might with advantage take a lesson from each other. Men cultivate their hearts too little, and, sometimes, their heads too much—an error no one can charge upon us. Let us exchange to some degree; let women think, and men permit themselves to feel, more than they are used to do. Why ignore any part of the being God created? Can we not see with our eyes, and hear with our ears, at one and the same time, and with no detriment to either sense? Verily, though I am a woman, I was meant to live my life not with one side of my nature alone. Love is sweet, love is divine; but so is life—the life God gave me, places before me, and watches over.

I have said thus to myself many scores of times during the years that have passed since our settlement at Byford. I faced fate almost defiantly at first; afterwards, my courage grew calmer and more true.

We had been in the country about six weeks only, when the mercantile house in which my father held a responsible post failed; and all that he had saved went in the general wreck. It was such a blow to the old man, that his health sunk under it; and it soon became evident that he would never be able to undertake a similar situation. When his physical strength in some measure returned to him, we found that his mind was sadly enfeebled, his memory defective, his former acuteness and shrewd foresight wholly gone. He would never be his olden self again; he could never work for his children more: they must now take care of him.

We considered our position, and made resolves for the future, bravely.

"I shall write—I shall make money by my writings," said Harriet. "Hitherto, I have been content with fame—but now——."

And for years she persisted in the idea, that whenever she chose to exert herself to find a liberal and enterprising publisher, competence, if not affluence, was within her grasp. But none of my sister Harriet's works were ever published, except two or three "light articles," which found a home in a fashion book, a presentation copy of which formed the author's remuneration.

Fortunately, we needed not to hang on literature as our sole means of support: each of us had a small sum of money yearly secured to us, which in our prosperous days had been our pocket-money; now, joined together, it would at least insure us from starvation. We wrote to Alicia, telling her that, now circumstances had so changed with us, it seemed right that we should all draw close together, and help one another. Her answer came, after some delay; she pleaded many and reasonable arguments why it was wisest and best for her to remain in her position of gorgeous dependence with the rich Mrs. Cleveland. Every possible reason, in fact, she adduced and brought forward, except the most obvious and probable—her own wish, which she evidently tried to persuade herself did not exist. Poor Alicia! she was not selfish enough not to be ashamed of her selfishness.

In the infancy of our plans arrived a letter from Ellinor Keith. She had just heard of our trouble: and she wrote, saying that her brother had resolved not to return to Byford; and that it would be a relief and comfort to them to think we had their old house. Would we rent it of them? And she named the amount of rent, which was small, as in most country-places. But then it was furnished; and she had anticipated any possible objection, by begging me to suffer it to remain so till they returned to England, and could make some arrangements about it. All she said was full of thoughtful sweetness, of considerate, sympathising affection; and in certain touches, here and there, I could trace where her



brother's clear head and vigorous judgment had been employed in our behalf. Also a few lines were added in his handwriting to the end of Ellinor's letter—a few lines—golden lines—words so good, of such warm, vital friendship, that my heart glowed and basked in a sense of satisfied pride, that for a moment almost transformed me. I comprehended the delicate kindness; and it was with the pleasantest feeling I had had for many a day, that I sat down to answer Ellinor's offer—to accept it. It was almost happiness to feel I could love them both again, they were so good.

And so we were settled at Byford, and the new life began. It was difficult, at first, to know—what, nevertheless, it would very soon be necessary to decide—the means by which we were to add to our scanty income sufficiently to enable us to support our father in some degree of the comfort he had been accustomed to. But we were especially fortunate, and a way was soon indicated; and so it came to pass that Grace and I kept a school.

It was on a very small scale at first; the widowed lord of the manor, going abroad for his health, left his two young daughters in our care; and from this introduction—it need hardly be said, whose careful friendship first suggested it—came gradually, many other pupils.

In all this change, things came easier to me than to Grace—there was so much for me to do. Activity well suited my temperament, and difficulty was a sort of mental food I found as pleasant as it was wholesome; moreover, I did not distrust myself so much as I had expected, after the first week or two. My patience failed me no more than my determination, and I felt a certain pride in discovering my power over my own nature. Passionate, impetuous, yet gloomily reticent of both passion and impulse; these were the predominant and unpromising characteristics of what was to be made into a teacher and companion of girl-children—girl-children! most sacred and beautiful of this world's denizens.

I think it was this sudden and intimate contact with child-nature that worked so salutary an effect upon my own. These two little girls, of six and eight years old, were not more, doubtless, than other children, fair, and simple, and true. But it was sufficient for me that they were not less. Their



presence, their innocent companionship, their talk, their laughter, and their tears, were all helps and safeguards to me against the more mutinous and turbulent portion of myself. And by and by came the greatest help of all—their love—the sweet, unthought-of, spontaneous, unreasoning love which a child, and only a child, can give. I believe that not till I open my eyes in heaven shall I ever again know the exquisite feeling I had when little Rosamond one day flung her arms round my neck, and looking into my eyes, before she pressed her soft face to mine, lisped out, “I do love you—so!”

For my poor Grace, meanwhile, it was much harder, sorer work, because she had not so much doing, and had more leisure for thinking and feeling. Moreover, love came to her so simply as a thing of course: people, grown people, and little children, loved her as they loved flowers and sunshine, and all blessed, beautiful things—because they could not help it. Love came to her, not as an added gift, but as a necessary accompaniment to the mere fact of being. Rosamond and Mary had always gone to her with their caresses and glad prattle, as naturally as they might to a rose-tree or to a singing bird; yet to her their love brought no comfort; it seemed, indeed, as if she scarcely recognised it. She would smile to them, talk to them, fold them in her arms and kiss them, and then put them away, and turn aside to her solitary musings, or the forced perusal of her book—forgetful, I could see, of everything in the wide universe, except the fact that she was most miserable.

I found it very hard to note, day by day, that she grew thinner, and paler, and weaker—that her voice altered in its tone, and became almost sharp—that her smile was no longer sweet, girlish, winning, as of old, but forced, and sometimes bitter; and gradually she grew hasty in her ways, and fretful in her temper—was often sarcastic to poor, unconscious Harriet; and to the old invalid father—alas, Grace!—even to him not so duteously patient as she should have been.

At length I remonstrated—I *would* tell her she was wrong—I *would* be heard. I waylaid her in her favourite walk at the end of the garden, and caught in mine the hand with which she tried, in her new, haughty fashion, to wave me away.

"Grace, my child, you must listen to me for a little while."

"I shall not; I am busy. I have matters of my own to think about. Go back to your school-children, Ella. Is there not interest enough for you in them?"

"Perhaps, if other interests were not dearer. But at present they have gone into the village with my father. You would not go with him, he told me."

"I wished to be alone. It is a strange thing," she went on, with a bitter laugh, "that the more humble the desire, the less chance there seems to be of attaining it. I have absolutely cut down, remorselessly crushed out, every single wish, every hope, every longing, except one—to be let alone; and you won't leave me that."

"No, I will not leave you that," I said sadly. I still held her hand, in spite of her restless efforts to get free. "Oh, Grace—oh, my little Grace!" I cried at length, in the uttermost entreaty of my heart. It touched hers, I could see, by the instantaneous quiver I felt pass through her, and by the sudden swerve of her long neck. How almost painfully slender it had grown to look, now that it had lost its graceful, habitual droop!

"I can bear to know you unhappy—to see you suffer," I went on, "and to stand by, powerless to help or to heal. But to see you altering from my innocent sister—to see you doing wrong, feeling wrongly—oh, Grace! it is too hard, too hard, and I cry out against it."

She answered never a word.

"Everything else has its comfort; *this* last, sorest, bitterest grief has none. Don't crush me with it, Grace. Look up at me with the old look in your eyes; lean your head on my shoulder in the dear old way. Grace! Grace! have pity on yourself—have mercy on me!"

"How can I?" she uttered in a hard, constrained voice. "What is it you are asking me, do you know? What am I to do? What is there left for me to do? I cannot go back, and be a child or a girl again; I cannot unlearn what I have learned. Such as I am, my fate has made me. So let it be."

"So it shall not be!" I cried desperately. "You shall conquer, and not be conquered. What you call fate is only circumstance."

"*Only*," she repeated: "that *only* has shaped all my life to come, until I die, and perhaps afterwards. I should be wicked if I had opportunity," she went on excitedly, and looking down my beseeching gaze with her glittering defiant eyes; "but in this quiet place, I can only think my evil, and not act it."

"Grace! what are you saying?"

"Do I frighten you?" She laughed, as if well pleased. "I will let you see more, then, into your sister's heart, since you care to know it."

"Are you sure *you* know it?"

"I think so, truly. I have had much companionship with it of late. Ella! I will call wrong, wrong, and I will face my misery as misery. At least I will be no hypocrite. I will *not* bow down my head, and say, 'It is best—I am content.' I will not wear the look of meek resignation, with hot rebellion flaming within me all the while. I dare to complain—to cry out. I am wretched, wretched, and from no fault of mine! I have been wronged of Heaven and of man! I would like to revenge myself on both."

I silenced her quivering lips with my hand.

"Oh, hush! Under this evening sky, to say such words. Grace! if our mother hears——."

"My mother—oh, my mother!" And there the poor half-delirious child sank down, and her head fell heavily upon my lap. Still the unnatural vitality of excitement gave her strength. I tried to hold her close to me, to keep her there; but she broke away, saying bitterly:—

"Why did you bring *her* name here? Let me go—oh, let me go! You cannot help me; you can only torture with your looks and your words. If I could but have died, and gone to my mother, before I felt like this! Now, it is too late. I shall never, never be fit to see her face again."

"Grace! you will—you shall."

"You don't know what I am—you cannot guess."

"I can. By the most intimate right, I *know*. My poor child, you think as I thought, as thousands of others have thought, that what you feel has never been felt before, will never be suffered again. It is so with all extremes, I suppose.

I remember, when I was very happy once, I thought the same."

I paused an instant. The allusion to that past happiness was a perilous one; my heart leaped, and sank back with a cold dead plunge; but I caught the flitting look on my sister's face, and I breathed in courage for myself, and hope for her, and went on:—

"I, too, have been very miserable; I, too, have thought that my misery was more than I could bear—that it was unjustly visited upon me; and that the wickedness it prompted within me was natural, inevitable—the human remonstrance against divine injury. Grace! I believed all this. I was as miserable as you are now; wicked feelings stirred within me as in you; I felt an alien in the world—this poor world that people call so bad. Every beautiful thing I saw or heard, struck discord upon my heart, which was so estranged from all beauty and all love. I was so far from God, that I thought His voice could never reach me more. I rebelled, first, and then I despaired."

"You despaired. You might well despair!" she cried impetuously. "What hope is there for us, unless we grow to be in love with pain, and find in endurance that which others find in sunshine and fresh air? Ella, we may well despair."

"Not to hope, is to blaspheme the living God. Grace! it was that which was wrong with me; it is that which now nearly maddens you. I see it looking out of your eyes; I hear it in every tone of your voice. Grace! in this world, there is sorrow most sad—pain most keen—anguish most bitter; but *misery*—no creature need know misery till its Creator's face is hidden from its blinded eyes, and it dares to doubt, to deny His mercy and His love. There is no misery in the wide world but that dread, unnatural enmity. Oh, come from it—cast it off—and be again a little child at the feet of your Father!"

And I ceased, for the thick sobs would no longer be pressed back. Tears never came easily to me, as to most women, but in a very passion—a storm that exhausted even while it relieved.

For a long time, while it lasted, Grace never turned her

head, never moved; but at length, at length there was a swift gesture, a sharp cry, and my little sister hung about my neck. Oh, the soft rain of tears that fell then over her pale face and long tresses of brown hair—the tender words I whispered over her—the old pet names I remembered to call her by! And then, half-frightened at the listless way in which her head drooped on her breast, and her cold arms clung round my neck, I lifted her from the ground, and fairly bore her into the house.

## PART IV.

SHE did not walk again for many weeks. I suppose that afternoon's crisis of excitement hurried on the approach of the terrible fever that now bore her down so remorselessly. For some days, she was held to be on the verge of death, and I counted her as already gone from me. Sometimes she lay on her little white bed, so quiet and so purely pale, motionless and ineffably calm, as if indeed her spirit already hovered above her mortality, and cast its shadow of light upon it.

But she recovered—very slowly, very gradually at first; so that for many days, even weeks, she was helpless as an infant, and had to be watched and tended like one. Like as to an infant, the new life seemed to gather upon her at last, hour by hour—till the long dormant faculties bestirred themselves again, and the struggling intelligence leaped up like a flame new kindled in purer air.

All things seemed to come to her newly; and she regarded them, thought of them, talked of them, with the freshness and vividness of utter inexperience, with more depth of feeling than childhood, but with no more apparent reticence of thought. Frankly, freely, she felt delight in things beautiful—enjoyment of things pleasant. Her faculty of sensation was like a child's, as easily touched and aroused, both to pleasure and pain. The clear blue of the sky, the ripples on the water, the glancing pebbles at the bottom of the little stream, the hum of insects, the chirp of birds, the



colour of flowers—all such things as these, seemed to fall upon her alert senses with an intensity of impression not easy for more blunted apprehensions to understand. As motes float clearly visible in pure light, so the myriad atoms of beauty and blessedness that hang—unseen by most eyes—about every thought of God that speaks in nature, were perceived by her, gladdened her eyes, and were precious to her heart.

In the latter days of convalescence, we used to take her sofa into the garden, and establish her for hours together under the thick shadow of a group of trees. From thence she saw the whole of the little domain; and the tricky rivulet that intersected it, had formed to itself a kind of nest close by, where, its banks thickly overgrown with hawthorn and maple, and wreathed with briony, it fell with a cool plash into a somewhat deep pool.

How she loved to watch that little stream, and listen to its song! The tree-boughs waved over it, and the sunshine sparkled in between; and there was always some new change to mark, of sight or of sound, the sunny August day through. Moreover, the trees that shadowed her were beautiful and eloquent to eyes and ears—dark fir, tremulous poplar, and gracious fair-growing beech. Through the diverse foliage glanced the sunlight, and chanted the wind—solemnly, mysteriously, sweetly, to the fragile little figure that lay so quiet, yet so full of eager, receptive life, beneath them.

I could not rest unless I was near her; and so I brought my pupils and their books to the great walnut-tree by the wicket that led into the corn-field, whence I could see her, though she could neither see us nor hear our voices. So passed many a glowing August day in that cool, green shadow, with the constant flowing of the water for its music, and the broad landscape, radiant in noon sunshine or purple in evening mist, stretched out beyond the peaceful foreground of the ordered garden, with its smooth lawn, and the adjacent meadows where the cattle grazed.

Most of his time, my father spent in fishing higher up the stream. He would return at evening; and we all went into the house together, there to find Harriet resting from her day's "work," and ready to take her carefully claimed post of head of the tea-table



It was a placid time for all of us, I think ; for some of us, a time of more than peace—of learning from divine teaching, of yielding to divine influences.

An event broke on the even current of these days ; a letter came from Alicia, announcing—her approaching marriage. We were all very much surprised, for it was a “good” marriage in more than the worldly sense of the term ; the husband elect being a physician residing at Baden, whom we had formerly known in London, and whom we knew to be both worthy and talented.

“But, at least, old enough to be her father,” Harriet observed ; “and ugly beyond the privilege even of men.” A passing bitterness, which relieved her mind, I thought. Poor Harriet ! she was but human ; and Alicia was two years her junior.

The bride invited us all to the wedding, and, indeed, evidently depended on our coming ; for her cordial invitations were intermingled with numerous commissions, and a long list of articles to be obtained for her in London, and conveyed by us. Of course, the proposition could not be considered : the expense and difficulty of the journey, Grace’s state of health, all made it impossible, we agreed at once ; and I felt a certain remorseful pang that no deeper feelings made the impossibility of the plan very painful or disappointing to any of us. I was astonished by Harriet’s sudden swerve from indifference to profound sisterly interest, the morning after the receipt of the letter.

“It is hardly right that poor Alicia should be entirely unsupported by any member of her family, on such an occasion. It is true, that you and my father are effectually detained in England, but I don’t see any impediment to *my* going : I should like to go.”

Briefly, she *did* go ; and one day in late September, we received at one and the same time the tidings of her safe arrival, and the happy solemnisation of Alicia’s marriage. I was not surprised also to see already hinted at, the plan which soon became a settled thing—that Harriet was to occupy her sister’s evacuated post of companion to Mrs. Cleveland ; but Grace was astonished, and rather perplexed.

“How were Harriet’s peculiar idiosyncrasies, her inde-

pendence, her resolute habit of ignoring the small courtesies of life, to be accommodated to such a position as that she had taken?"

"Dear, I think she is tired of this quiet life," I answered; and I felt a thrill of happiness pass through my mind, as I recognised my own content in that life; and, looking up, saw Grace's sweet, serene face. We were slowly sauntering through Byford wood, for Grace was strong enough now to walk a little every day. I went on with my attempted explanation: "Harriet would like change, excitement, society. They are wonderful words—like trumpet-notes to minds in certain phases."

"Yes," said my sister softly; "I remember when they were that to me. Ella, we were talking just now of the changes in nature; do you think they are so marvellous as the changes we can recognise in ourselves? Do you think the growth of a tree from a seed, of a butterfly from a caterpillar, is so mysterious, so inscrutable, as the way in which *we* alter and progress, till we can look back on the self of a year ago, and say, surprised, 'Was that *me*?'"

"Do you feel it so, little one?" I said to myself musingly. I was conscious of no similar marvel. The self of a year ago, though it was altered now, was yet no stranger to me; I knew the poor, troubled thing well; and I felt it was the same passionate spirit, with the same capacity of suffering that yet dwelt within me, though something else was there beside it. Nothing was taken away, but much had been added. But with Grace, I had long suspected it was otherwise. The storm which had cleared the atmosphere in her soul, had also torn down and swept away a great deal that in a harder, sterner nature, once living there, had lived for ever, even though all peace depended on its eradication.

Yes, the child *was* changed. I looked into her eyes, and felt grateful, almost to tearfulness; for I knew the very principle of her being—so tender, delicate, and sensitive—denied to her the power of endurance of suffering, to which some stronger, yet not deeper natures attain. She must root out the arrow, at any cost; she could not live while it rankled in her heart. I knew it, I could even dimly understand it, though it looked almost like miracle to *me*.

How pleasant the wood was that day ! there was a softness in the air, that felt as the warm amber clouds looked—generous, and tender, and gracious, as only in early autumn days do clouds and air look and feel. The ripening nuts hung thickly upon the hazel boughs ; briony and nightshade, in graceful tangle, half veiled the hedges ; and ivy, and wood-sorrel, and emerald moss, had overgrown the old trunks of the trees that had been felled the year before. On one of these we sat. It was a favourite seat with Grace. The ground sloped upwards, and from thence we looked down on Byford Valley—a scene smiling and luxuriant as ever inspired pastorals. Byford manor-house, with its quaint gables, and its rich, red colouring, stood near, on the other side of the slope—its grounds almost joining the wood at one point. As we sat, indeed, we could distinctly see the figures of the two children, Rosamond and Mary, with their two elder companions, emerging from the shrubbery-gate into the great field—too unostentatious to be called a park—that surrounded the house and gardens.

“ They are coming this way,” said I — “ the children, and my father, and Mr. Eustace.”

For I forgot to say that the younger brother of Mr. Thorpe had been spending part of his college vacation at the manor-house. He had been there about a fortnight on this particular day, and we had seen him often, and liked him much, as we could hardly fail to do—he was at once so good and so talented ; so boyish in his liveliness and eager energy, so manly in his chivalric sympathies and ambitions.

Yet, somehow, on this especial day of all days, I took note of Eustace Thorpe, and of his standing with us. Quiet as was our way of life, and limited our society, such a new element in the one, and addition to the other, ought to have impressed me more strongly before ; but it had not. He glided naturally into the way of things ; and he was so mere a boy to me, who hardly deigned to date manhood from an earlier age than thirty-five, that the fact of his being more than a boy, the children’s playmate, and our continual, and welcome, and very enlivening visitor, had in a sort passed me by.

Why a new intelligence should strike me on this soft

autumn afternoon, for the first time, is more than I can tell. I only know that it did so, while I watched the group slowly approaching, the children fluttering about, and their light laugh often ringing on the air. The old man toiled on, and sometimes paused to look round and enjoy the scene, as well as to rest; and for the young man, his tall, lithe figure was to be seen, now chasing or being chased by the children, now stooping in eager investigation of the ground in the cause of botany; and anon, he drew my father's arm in his, and carefully helped him up the ascent, his head bent towards him, the black hair tossed about his face.

"What a pleasant face he has!" I said impulsively.

Grace did not answer, till I looked round at her, and then she said quickly:—

"Very pleasant," and was silent again. So was I, as I resumed my watch. Nearer they came, and nearer: we could hear what they were saying.

"Let us go to the little copse," cried Mary, "and gather dewberries. Will you, Eustace?"

"Anywhere you will, if Mr. Gordon is not tired."

"But," interposed Rosamond, "I think Ella and Grace were going to the wood; and perhaps we might meet them."

At which words, the young man swerved from his course, as if by inevitable instinct, and hurried his pace also, until a second thought reminded him of his less active companion. Then he moderated to a walk again; but I could see something beyond the fleet eagerness of wings in the flash of his eyes, the impetuous toss back of the hair from his brow.

O Eustace, Eustace! And oh, my little sister, that sat so quietly beside me!

At first I thought my sister would be left to me for some time yet; they were both so young: but I found I was mistaken. Eustace had his mother's fortune, an ample, though not a large one; and his brother, the only one who had a right to interfere, cordially approved of his early marriage. In the face of this, and of Eustace's earnest pleadings, we had no right to resist. So, in the spring, I saw my little Grace become a wife; and watched the carriage drive along the winding road on its way to the seaport whence they were to embark for Italy. It happened, strangely and solemnly, that

on that very evening, while the two children were about my knees, listening to a story I was telling them—a letter was brought to me—a black-edged letter—in Ellinor Keith's handwriting.

I had the instinctive wit to send Rosamond and Mary from me on some errand.

"And you will tell us what became of Una afterwards, won't you?"

"And all about the good lion?"

"Yes, yes! Run quickly!"

They ran, singing the while. I watched them stop to pick up something from the path, and they called to me that it was a butterfly just burst from the chrysalis, and too weak to fly. Then they bore it carefully into the house; and I mutely called on God to help me, for I thought I was going to read that Gerard Keith was dead. For that brief five minutes while I sat with the unopened letter lying on my lap, all the old pain and bitterness came back anew. The sharp chillness of the April evening wind seemed to smite me as of old; the grey clouds looked drear and blank, as of old; all nature looked sullen, silent, cold, until out of my own silence grew the prayer that softened all things, and spread like a warm odour over my heart.

Then I opened the letter, and read these lines:—

"MY DEAR ELLA,—My dear friend, Ella, I write you one line before we leave this place. We laid Lillian in her grave three days ago. My brother is well, and all himself in his strong resolve to bear and to be patient. We purpose travelling for the next few months. We think and speak of you often. Good-by. Your affectionate

"ELLINOR KEITH."

Oh, what sorrowful, remorseful anguish of yearning found vent in the passionate tears I wept when I had read, and could take in the whole meaning of what I read!

He lived, and thanksgiving flooded my soul for that one bare fact, that one blessing that yet I felt it was all selfish in me to feel so grateful for. But he lived a life of which I could well fathom the story. Well I knew how long a time



must pass, how great a change must come, before the world that for him had lost its sunshine, would regain its light.

But he lived ; and I wept those passionate tears as much in gratitude for myself as in prayer for him—prayer that every moment became more piteously supplicating, more forlornly longing. To love, and to be impotent to help, was this to be my fate evermore ?

Yet even to this grief came solace ; even upon this pain, time came softly and brought peace. I had other letters from Ellinor, telling me how calmly, how beautifully the life flowed on that had been so bereft. Her brother was no idle sojourner in a strange land ; he made to himself duties, he set to himself worthy work wherever he abode. Into the dark, unvisited corners of those bright Italian cities, he penetrated, to help the poor, teach the ignorant, succour the ailing. And not only from her did I hear of him. It smote me with a strange feeling when I saw in one of Grace's letters to me, the name, his name written so clearly and fairly. In passing through one of the smaller Italian towns, Eustace had met Mr. Keith, with whom, as his brother's friend, he was acquainted. Grace was not with him, and he did not go to see her—I could well guess why. Simply, my sister wrote :—

“He looks much older, my husband says, and rather pale and worn ; but still so calm, and quiet, and serene, as we might know he would look. Ella, Eustace says it is good to reverence him, he is so good, so noble ; and, indeed, I feel it so—I felt it so, when long since, in the early days of our love, I told Eustace all the story of my past girlhood.”

O happy Grace ! How sunny must have been those days, spent in wandering through that sunny land ! love around her and beside her, and her heart garnering all its treasures, from whence had been weeded everything that could poison or wound.

While he passed on his way, his faithful sister with him ; and the shadow ever on his heart, but heaven's divinest light resting upon his brows.

And I, in his old home, where I had first known him, first loved him, and dreamed of happiness—where the morning light on the sloping woods ever looked to me as when I first looked on them—and then into his face, to see the radiance



"Don't, Bertha—don't think too much of these foolish fancies. I am worse than foolish to infect you with my dismal ideas. Come, let us talk ; you will do me good, and make me all right again. Let us be cheerful."

Looking back upon it now, I can hardly tell how I restrained the agony in my own heart to minister unto him. But I did so. In the gathering twilight we sat, until I had soothed him into a comparative serenity. It was strange, how his reason yet fought against his sensations. When I urged him to delay his journey for a time, he laughed, and, with something of his old pleasant banter, deprecated such a weakness, and derided himself for yielding to it as much as he had done. And his was always such a mercurial nature, that I felt no surprise at seeing him suddenly shake off all his gloom, and when Mary joined us, become even more than ordinarily vivacious. When the rest of the family joined us, he and my father began arguing in their usual style of quaint warring of wits. Mary sat silent, her fingers busily engaged with some light work ; my step-mother, equally speechless, at her unfailing wools ; and I—I could lie quite unthought of and unobserved on my sofa in the dark corner, out of the glare of the firelight and the lamp.

Oh, miserable—miserable evening ! It was surely not unnatural that I, spite of what seemed my better reason, should be deeply impressed by what Geoffrey had told me. I had carefully avoided letting him see how much I was affected by it ; but I could not conceal from myself the feeling of undefined terror and yearning anguish with which I watched him that last evening. I shivered as I gazed on his laughing face, and marvelled and doubted within myself whether his mirth were real or assumed. Well as I knew him, in the confusion and pain I had to battle against in my own mind, I could not satisfy myself with respect to what was passing in his.

Mary was to stay with me that night, and Geoffrey was to depart early the next morning. When we prepared to separate for the night, he bade adieu to my father and Mrs. Warburton, then he came to me. No one could see his face but I, as he advanced to my sofa. I turned hastily aside, saying I should see him in the morning before he went. I could not

bear it—to lie quiet there, bidding him a formal farewell, while my poor faint heart yearned over him in his trouble—his trouble, that only I knew to exist.

And so we dispersed to our several rooms. Directly we were in ours, poor Mary gave vent to the sadness she had been feebly striving to suppress the whole evening. I think I was more selfish than usual that night; I felt more of my old, wicked self stirring within me, than I had for many weeks. As I looked on her lying on the bed, as she had thrown herself in a childlike abandonment, her head buried in her outstretched arms, and her sobs sounding wildly and frequently, I clenched my hands, and bit my lips hard.

“You think you know what grief is,” I muttered within myself. “You believe you suffer! You! Can children love, or feel as we do—we, whom God has created women, but planted in our natures all the desperate earnestness of man, together with that unchanging, patient constancy, the fatal and exclusive birthright of every true woman since the world began?”

These thoughts were stirring within me as Mary raised her head, and looked on me with an expression of appealing helplessness.

“Dear Bertha!” she faltered, extending her arms to me—“come to me—take me to your bosom: I am so wretched!” And again her tears burst forth.

“‘Thank God—bless God—all ye who suffer not  
More grief than ye can weep for!’”

These words passed my lips, coldly and bitterly, almost before I was aware. She turned her sad face reproachfully upon me, with a vague sense of my meaning.

“Ah, you don’t know—you don’t know!” she said, slowly, and with an effort to subdue her own emotion. “It is childish, I feel, to be miserable because he is going from me for awhile. But ah, Bertha!—though the cause may be foolish, sorrow is sorrow, and you should pity me, for I have never known it till now.”

I had need to be more than humanly cold and stony, to resist her supplicating voice. My heart melted within me, and I clasped her in my arms, where she lay, troubled and

restless, through the night—only sinking into slumber a little time before the late dawn appeared.

Then we both arose, and descended into the room where Geoffrey's breakfast awaited him. She seated herself at the table, busying herself with the cups, striving very hard to maintain a cheerful look. So fresh, and young, and girlish she appeared, in the cold light of the January morning—trying to smile upon Geoffrey when he came in, and, seeing only her, seated himself beside her.

I was content to be disregarded. It was gladness enough for me to see on his countenance no trace of the fitful agitation of the day before; in his manner neither the heavy gloom, nor the wild vivacity that had then disquieted me so much. He looked quiet, composed, more serious than usual—and ah! so tenderly loving to the little clinging creature at his side!

We heard, gradually drawing near, the tramp of his horse, which was coming to take him to meet the coach. Then he rose, and Mary, too.

He had embraced her—had turned away—was leaving the room—when I, in a kind of reckless impulse, tottered forward from my quiet corner, silently holding forth my hand.

"Bertha! is it you?" he exclaimed, astonished—moved even, I thought,—and he sprang back to me, and carefully led me again to my seat. "Dear Bertha! And I was going away without seeing you."

"Never mind," I whispered; "only tell me—are you more content?"

"I am quite content," he answered, assuredly. "I only think happily of the time when I shall return."

He was interrupted by Mary, who, seeing him still linger in the room, stole to his side again. He caught her in his embrace, bending over her with love—unutterable—unlimited,—dilating in his eyes. And then he placed her in my arms, and said:—

"I leave my darling in your charge, Bertha! Keep her safely for me till I come. Always love her dearly—(ah! you could not do else!)—be gentle—be tender with her!"

He leaned over me, and kissed my brow. It was the first kiss he ever gave me.

When I opened my eyes, and knew myself again, Mary was lying, pale and still, where he had placed her, and I heard the sound of a horse's gallop dying away in the distance.

The days passed on. Mary was very much with me. She soon recovered, or almost recovered, her usual serenity—that true contentment we so seldom see out of childhood. Geoffrey's letters were great aids to this re-establishment of her cheerfulness. The first she received from him,—what a delight it was to her! She came running to me, holding it fast to her bosom the while, and began to read it in a transport of eager joyfulness. It was such a new pleasure to her—I believe it well-nigh compensated for the grief of separation. A week before, I should have thought so with some bitterness towards her light, girlish nature. But now my feeling towards her was changed. Geoffrey himself could not have been more tender, more gentle than I was in thought, and word, and deed, towards her whom he had so solemnly confided to my care. The echo of his words ever rang in my memory. *Always love her dearly, and be tender with her.*

The days when his letters came were always brighter days to me. I hardly knew the burden of anxiety that constantly rested on my mind, till it was partially relieved by the sight of his familiar handwriting—the large closely-written pages,—exact transcripts, too, his letters ever were of himself,—that Mary regularly received. She used to read them to me—part of them, at least—crouching beside my sofa,—her face flushed with gladness, her voice becoming broken ever and anon, and dying away into whispers; then bursting forth again in a blythe laugh at some piece of Geoffrey's gaiety. Well I remember them—those clear, cold, winter mornings, when the world looked so dreary without, and the wind wailed, piercing even through the silver joyousness of Mary's laughter.

I had always intended to leave Cliffe before the marriage. I had even arranged my plans so that I could leave without suspicion, and without giving them time to remonstrate. But ever since the night before Geoffrey's departure, the plan—the very idea even, had floated from my mind. All my

own pains were merged into the one dim, undefined anxiety I felt for him. All my own sickening wishes to be away—to be alone—yielded now to the passionate yearning I had for his safe return. Day by day the uneasy longing grew more intense; till, to have seen him back again, married to Mary, and happy, I would—ah, it is nothing to say I would have died—I would have lived, and looked forward to living long, long years—tranquil, and at peace!

At length a letter came, announcing the day he proposed to leave London. Three days after that day he would arrive at Cliffe. The marriage would then be arranged, and would certainly follow speedily. Mary's mother, half tears and half smiles at her darling's approaching bridal, had already been busily preparing for it. The wedding dress had come from London, and the veil, and the orange flowers. All would be in readiness by the time Geoffrey returned.

And the day fixed for that drew nigh. It came. It had snowed incessantly for three days previously; but that morning shone cloudless, and the sunshine was awaking the red-breasts into joyous warblings, as Mary triumphantly remarked to me, when she drew aside my window curtains, and urged me to hasten my toilet and come downstairs.

"Everything unites to give him welcome back," she said. "Look at the sea, how blue and sparkling it is! We have not seen such a sea for weeks, have we? And even the flowers! I have been into the greenhouse, and gathered an exquisite bouquet. The obstinate little tea-rose, that has refused to blossom for so long, has positively deigned to unclose a bud this very morning for Geoffrey."

She went on, half singing to herself, as she arranged two or three geraniums and a spray of myrtle together. When they were fixed to her satisfaction, she came and fastened them in my dress.

"For," she observed, laughing, "we will all look festal,—even you, dear, with your plain, high frock, and Quakerish little collar, will condescend to ornament *to-day*. You tremble!" she cried, suddenly. "You are not well, Bertha. What ails you?"

I could not tell her. I did not know myself. I said I was cold. And she hurried me downstairs to the warm



drawing-room—remarking, at the same time, that my face was glowing, and that my hands felt dry and feverish.

“Mamma is coming this morning,” she went on, as soon as we were established at the fireside; “and, do you know, Bertha, I am to try on my wedding dress. Mamma is to dress me, to see if it is all right. And there is a dress for you, which I have chosen. And you will wear it, wont you, darling?—although it isn’t made quite in that peculiar, half-puritanical fashion of yours, which I have learned quite to love, because it is peculiar to you.”

She caressed me fondly. I tried hard to shake off the unaccountable oppression that I laboured under. In vain. The while she flitted about the room, laughing, and talking, and carolling snatches of merry songs, I remained mute, as though perforce, with the mysterious, terrible burden weighing heavy on my heart.

Then Mrs. Lester came; and my step-mother and she talked long together, while Mary was appealed to by one or the other, every now and then. Once or twice they spoke to me, and I essayed to answer; but the words came thick and stifled; and, moreover, I failed to catch the sense of what they said, though I heard distinctly.

“Miss Warburton does not seem quite so well this morning,” observed Mrs. Lester, with concern.

“She is sleepy,” said Mary, as she hovered about me, and tried to find some little office in which to busy herself for me. “Let her keep quiet till——.” She kissed my closed eyes, and whispered the rest of her sentence.

“Bertha is no authority in matters of this kind,” my step-mother placidly remarked. “I never knew a girl who thought so little about dress. Really, it almost becomes a fault, such extreme negligence. But, as we were saying—whether a *ruche* or an edge of blonde will look best,” &c., &c.

Presently the door opened, and a servant announced the arrival of Mrs. Lester’s maid, with the dresses.

“It’s a pity Miss Warburton should have fallen asleep,” said Mrs. Lester. “However——.”

“Oh, she mustn’t be disturbed,” cried Mary. “Let her sleep quietly. And,” she added, in a lower tone, “I will go



and put on my dress, and come in and astonish her when she wakes."

The two elder ladies laughed, assented, and withdrew, and Mary, after once more arranging my plaids and cushions, followed them from the room.

I raised myself when they were gone, and pressing my head with my two hands, I tried to analyse the strange, inscrutable feeling which overpowered me. But even while I sat thus, its nature changed. My heart began to throb, wildly, loudly, so that I could hear its passionate pulsations; and an imperious instinct seemed to turn me towards the door of the room, which opened into the entrance hall.

"Geoffrey is coming already," I said to myself. I repeated it aloud—all the while *feeling* that it was not so—that Geoffrey was *not* near. Yet, at that moment I distinguished a horse's gallop, growing louder, till it ceased at our gate. And then quick footsteps along the gravel path—and then the peal of the outer-door bell, resounding in the house.

"It is Geoffrey," I said again, resolutely. "I will go and call Mary."

I knew it to be false. The throbbing at my heart stopped suddenly. I was quite calm, quite prepared for what I saw, when, opening the door, I found a servant listening, with a horror-struck face, to the quick, agitated words of the man who had just dismounted from his horse, and whose disordered appearance told of a hasty journey.

"Who is that?" he whispered to the servant, when he saw me, stopping suddenly in his recital, with a kind of shrinking.

"It is Miss Bertha—Miss Warburton," replied the other.

"Not the young lady that——."

"Come in here," said I, steadily. "Tell me all you have to say, and do not alarm any one else in the house. Come in."

He entered, and I closed the door.

"What has happened to Mr. Latimer?"

"Do not be too much—there may be hope—the doctor says," he began, with a clumsy effort at preparation.

"Tell me, in as few words as you can," I said; "and tell me the whole truth."

"Mr. Latimer arrived by the coach at P—— last night

late—or rather, early this morning. He seemed anxious to get on here at once, and would not be advised against taking horse, and going the remaining thirty miles. The roads, they told him, were in some parts dangerous from the heavy snows; but he said he knew them well, and thought nothing of the risk. About seventeen miles this side P—— the road runs close beside an old stone quarry. You may know it, Miss?"

"Go on—go on."

"The snow deceived him, we suppose, and he got out of the track. His horse fell with him. He was found there about two hours ago by some labourers. They took him into a little inn near. He was quite insensible; but the people knew who he was, and asked me——."

He was interrupted. The door opened, and there came in, with a buoyant step, a little figure, arrayed in rustling, glancing, dazzling white silk. The delicate lace veil fell cloudily over her head, shading the blushing cheeks—the laughing eyes. And Mary's blythe voice sounded clear and ringing:—

"Enter—the bride!"

I had felt calm, as I have said. Heaven knows what she read in my face which struck the smile from her mouth, and sent her flying to my bosom with a terrible cry. There she hung, vainly trying to give speech to the dread that overcame her; while Mrs. Lester, who had followed her into the room, stood transfixed, gazing first at me, and then at the strange messenger.

"For mercy's sake, tell me what has happened?" cried the mother. At length, hurrying to her child—"Mary, my darling, look up—come to me!"

But she kept clinging to me, till I unwound her fragile hold, and laid her—poor, pale child, in her shining bridal robes, on the sofa near.

I do not well know what followed. When at length Mary understood what had happened, her senses gave way, and she fell from one fit into another continuously. It was vain to hope she would recover sufficiently to go to her lover. Geoffrey would not have the blessedness of dying in her arms. But I knew how, if he ever regained consciousness, he would

yearn to see her, and I waited long, in an eternity, as it seemed, of torture, in the hope of bearing her with me.

In vain. I set forth alone, leaving her with a tribe of weeping women around her. I sprang on my horse, and in a moment was on my way across the moor.

In the midst of the chaos of my mind, I yet clearly remembered the last time I rode there with Geoffrey a little while ago; but oh! what a chasm yawned between then and now! I remembered, too, how stormy the day was then, and how serene my own heart! Now the sunshine seemed to float like a visible joy through the transparent air, and the low murmur of the sea sounded in the distance like a hymn of peace. The birds in a little grove that the road skirted were singing loudly—shrilly.

Merciful heaven! how mockingly it all blended with the dead, quick fall of my horse's hoofs, as I pressed him on towards Geoffrey and death!

I heard his voice before I entered the room where he lay. It sounded strange, yet fearfully familiar. His wild loud call was for Mary—always Mary! The doctor, who came gravely and sadly to meet me, asked with anxiety if I were she? And as I, not quite able to speak then, stood very quiet leaning against the wall, I heard the man who had returned with me answer in a low tone, "Bless you, no, sir! That other poor young lady was struck like dead when she heard; this one was as calm the whole time as could be. I don't think she is anything at all to him."

"I am his old friend," said I, answering the questioning glance of the doctor, "and the daughter of his host, Mr. Warburton. Let me see him."

They did not hinder me, and I went in. \* \* \* \* He thought I was Mary. When I drew near to him, he fixed his wild eyes on me, with a terrible likeness of look in them to what I had so often watched when he gazed on *her*. He clasped my hands in his scorching fingers, and pressed them with a kind of fierce fondness to his lips.

"Ah, my darling! my darling! I knew you would come," he said, in a subdued tone; "I have been waiting so long; but now I am happy!"

"It seems to compose him, the sight of you," observed the doctor, after a pause of comparative quietude in his patient. "I suppose he mistakes you for some one else!"

Ah! God be merciful to our weak human nature, how bitter that thought was, even then!

I remained still, my hands pressed in his hot clasp, till he sank into an uneasy slumber. I could better bear to look at him then, when his eyes—the bright, frank eyes, now all glazed, and dry, and fiery—were closed. And I looked at him. From amid the wreck before me of tangled hair, and haggard cheeks, and lips parched and blood stained, I gathered up and treasured in my soul the likeness of his olden self, that was ever to remain with me till I should see him restored to it again—in heaven.

\* \* \* \* By and by the doctor came in; then after looking at him, turned to me with mouth close set. "Would you wish other advice sent for?" he whispered.

I shook my head, saying, what I then first remembered, that my father and Dr. Ledby were to have followed me.

"Nothing more can be done, I apprehend," he muttered again. He was a man eminent in the district, and having, indeed, a fearful experience of similar cases among the miners and stonecutters.

"How long——?"

"He cannot possibly exist many hours," he said, adding some professional remarks which I but imperfectly comprehended; "about—perhaps towards night."

He paused considerably, imagining, perhaps, that there *might* be some feeling hidden underneath the blank calm he doubtless thought so strange. Then he silently took his leave.

I remained alone with Geoffrey. Occasionally the woman of the house came in with offers of service, but she never stayed long, and her intrusions grew less frequent as the day advanced. My father and Dr. Ledby did not appear. I do not know why—I never knew.

I did not think of their absence. My whole world of thought, of feeling, was bounded by the rude walls of that little room. There I sat and watched his fitful sleep, or listened to the terrible ravings of his troubled waking. He

would slumber for a few minutes, and then awake, each time to a new form of delirium. Sometimes he pushed me from him, shrieking out that the sight of me was a torture to him, and bidding me leave him—leave him! Again he fancied I was Mary, and spoke tenderly, in low murmurs, telling how dear I was, how fondly he loved me, clasping my hands, and looking up into my eyes, till I too had well-nigh shrieked out in my agony and despair.

And so passed the day.

The day!—his last of earth—my last of him! And the noon sun faded quietly away, the red sunset glowed into the little room, and the dull twilight came on.

He had fallen into a sleep—deeper and more protracted than any former one—leaning his head upon my arm as I crouched down at his bedside. And while he slept, the twilight deepened into night, and through an opening in the window curtain, I could see stars shining.

The firelight flickered on the wall, and played upon my face, as I could feel. And when I turned my eyes from the stars, by the coal flame I saw that Geoffrey was awake, and looking on me with a changed look—with his own look. And he uttered my name in a low faint voice, trying the while to lift his head.

I raised it silently, and we looked at one another. The doctor had foretold this change. I knew what it portended. It was not *that* though, but it was the familiar sound of his voice calling on my name in the old, old tone, that smote upon me, moistening my burning eyes with a great gush of tears. Perceiving them, he smiled up at me with a quiet smile, that made his face look divine for the moment. But it passed quickly.

“Mary—where is Mary?” he asked uneasily. “Why is she not here?”

I told him. A look of intense anguish came over his features, and then again they took an expression of ineffable tenderness, while he murmured, as to himself:—

“Poor child! poor innocent darling! God comfort her!”

He closed his eyes, and said no more. I watched him and was silent—my tears all spent. Presently he turned towards



me, and with a gesture caused me to kneel down close beside him, so that I could hear his faintest utterance.

"It is hard," he faltered, "not to see her once more. But you, dear Bertha, my true sister! you will stay with me to the end? You do not fear?"

"No—ah no! Yet,—O Geoffrey, Geoffrey!"

The strong agony—the wild love—would not be repressed. It all burst forth in that long wailing cry, which he heard, but did not understand. O woeful, woeful love, that must be thrust back, trampled down, hidden out of sight, even in such an hour as this!

"Kind Bertha! dear loving friend!" he kept saying, feebly stroking my head as it lay crushed down between my hands. Then there was a silence, till again he spoke.

"Bertha! you will take care of Mary? You will never forsake the child? Look up, and promise me."

I tried to speak. But my strength failed me when I met his eyes, and again the cry escaped my lips:—

"O Geoffrey!—My Geoffrey! Let me die!"

He scarce heeded; only looking steadfastly at me he repeated, in a troubled tone, "Promise me!"

I lifted my eyes once more to his face, where the indescribable change was growing fast—fast. And the sight froze me into quietness again.

I promised, and the anxious look faded away into a beautiful calm.

"You will love her. You will watch over her happiness. You will never leave her, Bertha?"

"Never—till I die!"

"Good, dear sister!" he murmured. "Tell her, tell her," he went on, his voice gradually weakening, "tell her I bless her; tell her——."

He moved restlessly on his pillow. I gently raised his head and rested it on my shoulder. He lay there quite content, and once again smiled up in my face, pressing my hand, which he still held. Then his lips moved in prayer. I could distinguish my own name and *hers* repeated many times, while the brightness of that last smile yet lingered on his face.



Then his hold of my hand was loosened, and the lips stirred no longer.

I knew that my arms held only Geoffrey's corse.  
And he knew *then* I loved him !

A long time has passed since that night.

I have kept my promise. Mary and I have never been long separated. I was with her through all the time of deep, desperate woe that followed upon Geoffrey's death. I was her nurse, her helper, her comforter—even *I* ! I prayed with her, and for her, as I had learned to pray only since I had seen *him* die. And from that time until now I have been her constant friend, her tender watchful sister—as he would have wished. And as I felt myself gradually drawing nearer to the rest I so long prayed for, my only care was the thought of leaving her before my work was done, and I no longer needed.

That trouble is removed. Mary's grief, so terrible at first, so wild and so despairing, has yielded to the influence of changed scene and lapse of time. Renewed health brought fresh feelings—new hopes. She was so young—life was as yet almost an unread page to her. Gradually, the one sad memory assumed a new shape in her mind, till at last it became as it will be, I believe, evermore, a kind of sacred, solemn presence, too sacred and too solemn to be mixed up with the common daily existence, but shedding its influence continually around her purer, inner life.

And I was scarcely surprised, for I had long watched the progress of this change in the girl's soul, and been happy at it, when Mrs. Lester told me, but a few weeks since, that she thought, she hoped, Mary being worthily wooed, might again be won.

And it was so. It seemed strange at first—as she herself must have felt, so much she blushed and trembled when she next saw me.

But I am of a humbler spirit than I was. I do not dare to judge a nature made by God. I have learned too bitterly my own weakness—my own wickedness—to feel otherwise than indulgent to the imperfections of others, though they take a different shape from mine.

So I struggled against the rebellious feeling that for a little

their home near London, but every summer they come with their children to the old manor-house, and we have happy days. Then do the woods become haunted with glancing feet, and uplift faces with golden curls, all tangled and straying, and childish voices and girlish laughter echo back the music of the soft wind and the low songs of birds.

While Grace and I, demurely seated in our old and forgotten seat in the wood, watch our children, and talk pleasant, loving talk. *Our* children, I have said, for Rosamond and Mary are very dear to me, and still remain with their governess, not to leave her till the inevitable demands of that same "world," that here seems so far off, shall take them away for a season, or, it may be, for longer.

But we will not think of that. Let me look, instead, at the sweet face of my sister, as she sits looking at her children, with the old lustre in her eyes, the old dewy smile on her lips; hardly less a child in all that makes childhood lovely, than when *she* too made daisy-chains, or peered with wondering eyes into the wild-bee's nest, as they are doing now.

Let me look upon the broad landscape spread before my eyes under the clear heavens, where float, or lie cumulose, clouds exceeding white, as if in excess of some mysterious joy that extils itself in radiant purity most absolute. Widely stretch the woods, over which hovers the misty prescience of the coming autumn; and emerald fields slope to the valley, where winds the streamlet, clear and shining as light, and, like light, glancing and flickering through the foliage of the trees that bend beside it. And beyond, there is the glory and rejoicing of the harvest; ripe and rich it sways in the sunshine, like an amber sea; and larks are singing overhead, as if giving utterance to the fulness of a dumb human soul.

It is a beautiful world; divine love is with it, divine blessings are lavished on it, and it is beautiful, and good, and holy. And life, too, is holy and precious, while God watches over it. Let us come forth, then, we that have known sorrow, or even now are suffering from some hidden pain, that we think is ceaseless as it is venomous; and let us look into the beauty of the world He made, and learn the sacredness of the life He has given.

And if life for you and for me holds not happiness, it may yet hold something that is better, that even our humanity may rise to recognise as better.

So, let us look it in the face, and travel on the way that is appointed for us to go.

## ERTHA'S LOVE.

It was a pleasant evening, and I ran through the garden and along the narrow path that wound down the cliff to the beach. I held in my hand the flowers he had given me, and the soft breeze that tossed my hair over my face was laden with their perfume. I was so happy—I did not ask myself why, but a new and strange sense of blessedness was throbbing in my heart; and as I stood still and looked at the great sea stretched out before me—at the gorgeous calm of the August sunset—I felt as I had never felt since I was a little child, saying my prayers at my mother's knees.

I wandered along close to where the waves came rippling over the red pebbles. The dark rocks looked glorified in the western radiance, and the feathery clouds floated dreamily in the blue space, as if they were happy too. How strange it was that the beauty of the world had never spoken to my heart till that evening!

I climbed to my favourite seat in the recess of that great black rock which abutted on the sea even at ebb of tide, and where the fantastic peaks of brown stone rise on all sides save where the incessant beating of the waves has worn them away. All the world was shut out, save ocean and sky; and in the vast mysterious sea heaving in the glow reflected from the heavens, I seemed to find a sympathy with the great happiness that thrilled within me. My hands clasped over the flowers—I raised my head to the still heaven, where a quiet star seemed watching me—and a thanksgiving rose from my very soul to the God who had made the world so fair, and me so happy!

Gentle thoughts arose in my mind:—I thought of my dead mother, and of the great love I had borne her, which, since she died, had lain dormant in my heart—*till now!* Ah,

how that heart leaped at those little words whispered to itself. I thought of my olden self—of what I had been but two short weeks before, with a kind of remorse, chastened by pity. If I had had any one to love during all these years, I thought, I should surely never have become the woman I was—whom people called unbending—austere—and cold. Cold! Little they guessed of the passionate yearning for love that had for so long been rudely crushed back into my desolate heart, till all its tenderer feelings were, from their very strength, turning into poison. Little they knew of the fierce impulses subdued—the storms of emotion oftentimes concealed beneath that frigid reserve they deemed want of feeling. But I had always been misunderstood and harshly judged—I had always been lonely—uncared for—unsympathised with.

*Till now!*

Now I had some one to love—some one who cared for my love—and who loved me again, as I knew, I felt assured he loved me, though no lover's word or vow had ever passed between us. How holy this new happiness made me! How it sanctified and calmed the troubled heart, so restless, so stormy in its unsatisfied longing heretofore—restoring to it the innocent repose it had not known since it ceased to be a child's heart and became a woman's!

How tenderly I felt to all the world—to my very self, even! I looked down into a deep pool of water formed by a break in the rock; the dark waters gave to my view my face, with its firm, hard outlines, the large steadfast eyes, and the black hair which I loved, because yesterday Geoffrey had said it was beautiful. I took a curl tenderly into my hand—kissed it—and felt my glad tears fall on it:—what a child I was!

The sunset was fading when I returned home. As I ascended the cliff I saw a figure that I knew, leaning over the shrubbery gate—a head bent forward, with waving hair tossed in his own careless fashion over his brow. His voice reached my ears at the same moment:—

“I am watching for you, Bertha; you truant, to stay away so long!”

Who had ever watched for me before? Who had ever taken such note of my absence, or thought the time long when

I was away? I felt all this as I quietly pursued my way towards him; keeping my eyes fixed on the rugged pathway, not daring—God help me!—to look up at him when I knew his gaze was on my face.

He opened the gate for me, drew my arm within his, and we slowly walked towards the house.

"We have had visitors this evening," said he; "and one of them remains with Mrs. Warburton to-night. A Miss Lester;—do you know her?"

"I have heard my father speak of her, but I have never seen her."

"Mr. Lester, it seems, knew *my* father in his young days," he resumed, "and claimed acquaintance with me on that ground. He is a courtly, precise, well-expressed elderly gentleman of the old school. I like him;—a real, thoroughbred formalist now-a-days is so rare."

He idly switched with his hand the flower-laden branches of the syringa trees we were sauntering among.

"Mrs. Warburton"—in speaking to me he never called my step-mother by any other name—"Mrs. Warburton is going back with Miss Lester to-morrow, to stay two or three days with her at F——. Then, Bertha, we can have the horses and gallop over the downs as we have often promised ourselves."

I was silent, and he looked at me curiously.

"Ah—you will like that, little Bertha!" he cried, patting my hand which lay on his arm; "your eyes are not so cautious as your tongue, and I can read what they say quite well. Why are you hurrying on so fast? They are all in the greenhouse, looking at the miserable specimens of horticultural vegetation that you savages here call *flowers*. As if tender blossoms born under a southern sky could survive when brought to a bleak precipice like this."

He looked at me again, in laughing surprise. "What, Bertha! not a word to say for your Cornish cliffs? I expected to have been fairly stunned with your indignation at my impertinence. Are you tired of defending the beloved scenes of your childhood, or do you begin to doubt my sincerity in abusing them?"

I murmured something in reply.



"You know very well that I love them too," he pursued—"that every old tree on the down, every rugged rock on the shore is dear to me. I little thought, when your father insisted on bringing me home with him, that I should spend such a happy time in this wild country. Still less that in the quiet, dark-browed child I just remembered seeing years ago, I should find a dear companion—a friend. Ah, Bertha, you yourself don't know how much you have been my friend—what good you have done me. I am a better man than I was a month ago. If I had had a mother or a sister all these years, I should have done more justice to the blessings God has given me. Nay, Bertha, don't go in yet. I tell you they are showing Miss Lester the poor little geraniums and things that Mrs. Warburton is so proud of; they won't be ready for tea this half hour, and it is so pleasant out here."

We were standing on the terrace which skirted the southern side of the house. It was the highest part of the ground, and commanded a view of the coast for some miles. I shall never forget the sea as it looked that minute; the moon's first faint rays trembling over the waters—the white foam enlightening the broad colourless waste, where the waves were dashing over the rocks near shore. Again, my spirit was strangely softened within me, and hot tears rose to my eyes. He saw them, and gently pressed my hand in sympathy. He thought he understood what I felt, but he did not know—he never knew; I scarcely comprehended myself, I was so bewildered by the fulness of happiness that was bounding within me.

"Bertha, you are chilled—you are shivering," said Geoffrey, at length; "perhaps it is too late for you to be out. The dew is falling, and your curls have quite drooped; so we will go in. Good-by to the moon—and sea—and stars!—and, ah, Bertha, good-by for to-night to our pleasant talk together;—*now* we must be sociable, and agreeable, and conventional, I suppose. Is it wrong to wish this intruding Miss Lester at—at Calcutta, or Hyderabad, or any other place sufficiently removed from our quiet family circle? No happy evening for us, Bertha, *this* evening! Your father won't go to sleep over his newspaper, and Mrs. Warburton

won't doze over her embroidery, and we sha'n't have the piano to ourselves. Cou——. Oh, I could swear!"

When I entered the drawing-room my father called me to him, and presented me to the young lady who stood by his side.

"This is Mary Lester, the daughter of my old schoolfellow, of whom you must often have heard me speak, Bertha. They have come to stay some months at E——, and Mary is anxious to know you."

With a gesture of girlish cordiality, half eager, yet half shy, Miss Lester took my hand (how brown it looked in the clasp of her white fingers!) and gazed up into my face with her own sweet, loving expression, that I afterwards learned to know so well. I was always reserved, repellent perhaps, to strangers; but *now*—I wondered at myself—at my softened manner—at the gentle feelings stirred within me, as I bent towards her, and pressed her hand.

My father was as much pleased as he was surprised, I could see.

"That's well—that's well," said he, as he resumed his seat: "you two ought to be friends, as your fathers were before you."

"I hope so," murmured Mary, in a timid voice, clinging to my hand as I moved to my usual seat at the tea-table. She sat close beside me, and I could see Geoffrey watching us from the window where he was standing, with a displeased expression. I understood so well that twitching of his lip. I, who could interpret every change in his face, every flash of his eye, every turn of his haughty head, I knew that he did not approve of my unwonted amiability to my new friend—that he had a jealous dislike of her in consequence. How happy it made me to know it!—how doubly tender I grew towards the unconscious girl beside me!—what an overflowing satisfaction I found in the reserve and coldness which suddenly came over *him*! He remained silent for some time, during which my father was reading his newspaper, and my step-mother counting the stitches in her embroidery, while Mary Lester and I conversed together. At length my father's attention was aroused.

"Why, Geoffrey!" cried he, "what ails you? This is a day of metamorphoses, I believe. Here is our quiet Bertha chattering gaily, while you, our enlivener-general, and talker *par excellence*, sit silent and uncompanionable as a mummy."

"Talkers are like clocks, sir, I think," he answered, laughing lightly, "and one is enough for a room. Especially when that one does duty so admirably." This last was accompanied by a quick glance at me, as he rose from his chair, and sauntered to the window again.

"Bertha, come and look at this star," he cried, presently, and I left Mary to my step-mother, and joined him.

"Are you going to be fast friends with that pale-faced little thing all in a minute?" said he, in a low tone; "because, if so, I am *de trop*, and I will go back to London to-morrow morning."

"Dear Geoffrey," I remonstrated, "I must be kind to her; she is our guest. Come and talk, and help me to amuse her."

"I can't amuse young ladies. I detest the whole genus. I daresay she will make you as missish as she is, soon; and then, when I have you to myself again, you'll be changed, and I sha'n't know you. We were so happy till this visitor came," he added, regretfully, "and now she will spoil our pleasant evening, and our music, and our astronomical lecture, and our metaphysical discussions. How can you like her, Bertha?"

I felt quite a pity for the poor girl he thus unjustly regarded.

"She is gentle and loveable," I urged; "you would like her yourself, Geoffrey, if you would talk to her, and be sociable."

"Sociable!—ah, there you are! I hate sociability, and small parties of dear friends. In my plan of Paradise, people walk about in couples, and three is an unknown number."

I could see that he was recovering his wonted spirits, which, indeed, rarely left him for long.

"Do be good," I persisted, "and come with me, and talk to her."

"And ignore Paradise, for once?" He tossed back his hair, with a gesture peculiar to him when he was throwing aside some passing irritation, and then smiling at my serious

face—his own frank, sunshiny smile,—“Ah, Bertha!” said he, “you put all my peevishness to flight. I had so determined to be ill-tempered and disagreeable—but I can’t; it seems. It is impossible to resist your persuasive little voice, and those great, earnest, entreating dark eyes. So we will leave Paradise, and be mundane for the nonce.”

We went and sat by Miss Lester. I was glad to be relieved of the necessity of talking much, and I leaned back in my chair, and listened to Geoffrey’s animated voice, which was occasionally, but not often, interrupted by a few words from Mary. He was very “good.” He threw off all his coldness and reserve, and appeared bent on making atonement for his previous ill behaviour, by being quite friendly with the obnoxious visitor. It was now dusk, and I could only see the shadowy outlines of the two figures: Geoffrey, with his head stretched slightly forward, and his hands every now and then uplifted with an emphasising gesture; and Mary sitting farther in the shadow. I had thought her very lovely; her beauty was of that species that I especially admired in a woman; perhaps because the golden hair, the regular classic features, and the soft eyes, were all so utterly different from my own. I remembered the face I had seen that day reflected in the rocky pool—the face I had, till lately, thought so forbidding, so unlovely. I should never think so again—never! What a blessed thing it was to know that there was one who looked on it with tenderness, as none had done before, since my mother died. As I mused in the quiet twilight, with his voice murmuring in my ears, and the sense of his presence gladdening me, I again thanked God for sending me such happiness—happiness in which, like as a river in the sunshine, the dark and turbid waters of my life grew beautiful and glorified.

The next morning, immediately after the departure of my step-mother with Miss Lester, Geoffrey and I rode out upon the moors.

It was a tempestuous day. The wind blew fiercely; the clouds careered over the sky in heavy, troubled masses, and not a gleam of sunshine lit up the great waste of moorland as we sped over it.

I revelled in the wildness of the weather and the scene, in the blank desolation of the moor,—in the vast tumult of the darkened sea, chequered with foam, which stretched far away, till it joined the lowering heavens at the horizon. The great gusts of wind, the general agitation which pervaded earth, sea, and air, inspired me with a sense of keen and intense vitality, that I had never felt before. There is no mood of nature that comes amiss to a soul overflowing with its own happiness. I was silently thinking thus, when Geoffrey's first words smote me with a strange idea of contrast to the thoughts busy in my mind.

"What a dreary day!" said he; "how forlorn this great barren plain looks! And the wind!—It cuts and slashes at one with a vindictive howl, as if it were a personal enemy. Is it possible you can stand against it, Bertha? What an amazon you are! Fighting with these savage sea breezes of yours requires all my masculine endurance and fortitude."

"Shall we go back?" I asked him, feeling a vague pain. And, somehow, as I looked round again, the moor *did* look drear and monotonous, and the wind had a wailing sound which I had not noted before. "You are not used to the rough weather we have in the west," I added; "perhaps we had better return and reserve our ride for a more fitting season."

"No, we won't be so cowardly; and, after all, a day like this is perhaps experienced under its least gloomy aspect in the present circumstances. That is to say, mounted on gallant steeds, and galloping over a broad tract of land, which, Bertha, whatever its shortcomings in picturesque beauty, is, I allow you, first-rate riding ground."

He urged his horse forward as he spoke, and we dashed on at full speed for some time. The clouds above our heads grew denser and darker every moment. At length, a large rain-drop fell, then another and another. Geoffrey reined in his horse with a suddenness that threw the animal on its haunches.

"A new feature this in the delights of the day," said he, laughing, with a slight touch of peevishness; "a down-pour of rain (steady, old boy!), under the energetic direction of this furious gale, will be a fit culmination to the *agremens* of our ride. There is enough water in that big round cloud there



to drown us three times over, horses and all. And here it comes."

As indeed it did, with a steady and gradually increasing violence. Fortunately, I remembered we were near one of those huge masses of stone, which, from their size and eccentric arrangement, form such objects of curiosity on our Cornish downs. To this we hurried, and dismounting, secured, with some difficulty, our horses under one projection, and sheltered ourselves under another.

"Welcome retreat!" cried Geoffrey. "I do really wish that the long vexed question, as to how these queer heaps of granite got perched here, were satisfactorily decided, if only that we might bestow our gratitude in the right quarter. Heavens! how the wind blows!"

We were now on high ground, and the gusts came with furious force. I had to catch hold by the stone to keep my footing, once or twice.

"Little Bertha, you will be blown away, you are so tiny!" and he drew my arm through his own. "I must take care of you. Why, you look quite pale! You are not afraid?"

"No, oh no!"

"We are quite safe here: and, after all, this is a fine specimen of the wild and grand. How the sea rolls and throbs in the distance, and what a hollow roar the wind makes among these stones! I am half reconciled to this kind of weather and this kind of scene, Bertha; I begin to see grandeur in this great barren waste of land, and the waste of waters beyond, and the broad heavens meeting that again. The infinitude of monotony absolutely becomes sublime. Ah, you look satisfied; I see you approve of my enthusiastic eloquence. I feel rather proud of it myself, in the teeth of this Titanic wind, too, which," he added, as a fresh gust thundered in upon us, "will certainly carry you off, if you don't hold closely to my arm. It's an awful day! Any other girl would be frightened out of her wits."

Frightened!—I had never known such serene contentment, such an ineffable sense of security, as I felt then, when, clinging to Geoffrey's arm, I looked out on the stormy world without.



There was a silence. A certain timid consciousness constrained me to break it, lest he should observe my taciturnity.

"I trust my step-mother and Miss Lester have reached F—— in safety," said I; "their road was a very unsheltered one, in case the storm overtook them."

"They went in the phaeton," he rejoined, carelessly, "and they are sure to be all right. Fortunately so, for I am sure that delicate little girl would never stand against such a tempest as this. If she wasn't caught up, bodily, in one of the blasts of this hurricane, which seems to have a great fancy for trying to carry away young ladies, she would expire of sheer terror. You know, we inland dwellers are not accustomed to proceedings like these."

A furious burst of wind, which seemed almost to shake the huge mass of stone we were leaning against, interrupted him; and then came a perfect torrent of large hail-stones, which the wind drove in upon us, and which effectually stopped all conversation for the time. Suddenly, amid the confusion of sounds, I fancied I heard a cry, as of a human voice, at some little distance; but when I told Geoffrey, he only laughed.

"Isn't our position romantic enough as it is, you insatiable person, but you want, in your genius for dramatic construction, to bring in an underplot—an exciting episode—a sharer in our adventure; a young and lovely girl, who mistakes these hail-stones for bullets ('faith, she might be forgiven the blunder!) and shrieks for mercy? or, would you prefer a gallant cavalier, who——."

"Nay," I persevered, "it is quite possible for others besides ourselves to seek shelter among these stones. The F—— road across the moor is not so far distant, remember."

"I prefer a supernatural resolution of the problem," he answered, still laughing, "and we will, if you please, attribute the sound in question to the ghostly inhabitant of this wilderness, who is distracted and bewildered by human society, and therefore——."

"I hear voices, Geoffrey—I do, indeed," interrupted I. The hail-storm had subsided, and even the wind, within the last few minutes, had lulled slightly. I ventured outside our rude refuge, and looked around. At a little distance, I saw

the dejected head of a thoroughly drenched horse, which I recognised at once as our own "Colin," which had that morning conveyed away my step-mother and our guest, in the phaeton. The carriage itself, and those in it, were hid by the quaint granite heap they were sheltering against.

"Colin, by all that's wonderful!" cried Geoffrey, looking with me. "I beg you a thousand pardons, Bertha—I'll never question your suppositions again. What melodrama ever hit on a more startling coincidence than this? How did they ever get here, I wonder? Shall I go and ask them?"

He went, without waiting my assent, and I watched him fighting his way against the wind to where the little carriage stood. I heard his frank laugh, and the exclamations of surprise from the two ladies and the attendant servant. Then the voices lowered, so that I could not hear. The fury of the storm had now passed, and, in my experience of the weather incident to our western coast, I knew the wind would soon drop, and a calm evening end the turbulent day.

It seemed a long time before Geoffrey returned, running, and with a face expressive of some concern.

"Poor Miss Lester!" he cried; "in jumping from the phaeton, she missed her footing, and has twisted her ankle in some way. She can't walk, and she is in very great pain. Come to her, Bertha. Your mysterious cry, you see, is thus unluckily accounted for."

I found Mary Lester crouched among chaise cushions and warm wraps, her cheeks paler than usual, and her eyes closed, as if in exhaustion. She opened them, however, and smiled affectionately on me, as I approached. My step-mother was sighing and regretting, in a perfectly inane and incoherent manner.

"Had not Miss Lester better be lifted into the chaise, and conveyed at once to our house?" I suggested; "it is much nearer, and you will not be expected at F—— after this storm."

"Quite right," pronounced Geoffrey, with his usual air of decision; and while Mrs. Warburton was still in a hazy state of incertitude and despondency, he and I proceeded to take measures for carrying my plan into execution.

Miss Lester had to be fairly carried into the phaeton:

Geoffrey, with a few half apologetic words, took her in his strong arms as though she had been a child, and carefully deposited her among the cushions. As he did so, I saw a faint crimson dawning over her pale face, and thought how lovely and how loveable she was. That was my only thought.

We waited till they had driven off, and then Geoffrey and I mounted our horses and followed them. We were both very silent; but I did not care to talk, and therefore did not notice his abstraction. The storm had passed off—the wind was dying away minute by minute, with a low wail that sounded as though it were singing its own requiem. We galloped swiftly over the moor, as I was anxious to reach home before the others, that I might prepare for Miss Lester's reception.

I love to dwell on the recollection of that day. I was so happy, and my happiness made every passing vexation seem as nothing, steeping all the ordinary occurrences of the day in its own sweet calm.

I remember how, after I had carefully settled Miss Lester on a sofa in the pleasant little room leading to the greenhouse, Geoffrey came in, sat down, and took a book. After awhile, I asked him to read aloud, and Mary added her entreaties. And he complied, drew near the sofa, and began. The invalid, resting her head on her hand, looked sometimes half shyly at his face, as if liking to watch unobserved its ever-changing expression; and I sat busying my fingers in some light work, on which I kept my eyes fixed. I did not need to look up at his face;—I saw it always—always!

It was a German story he was reading, about a brother and sister who loved each other so dearly, that when another love came to the girl she renounced it, and gave to the brother, who had but her in the world for his happiness. When the story was finished I saw tears in Mary Lester's eyes, and so did Geoffrey. He tried to laugh away her pensiveness.

“Do you ladies approve of such a wholesale massacre of people's happiness as this principle would involve, carried out to its fullest extent?” “The greatest misery of the greatest number,” seems to me to be the motto of this school

of moralists. Poor Hildegunde!—poor Karl!—poor Ludwig! Poor everybody! One is sick with pity after reading such a story. Isn't it so, Miss Lester?"

She smiled, and drooped her head with a childish bashfulness to hide the moistened eyes.

"I like it," she said, presently: "I like stories about brothers and sisters. I have a brother whom I love very dearly."

"As dearly as Hildegunde loved Ludwig?" questioned Geoffrey, half sportively; "would your affection go so far—sacrifice so much?"

Innocently she looked up, as if scarcely comprehending his meaning—then the dark lashes fell again over her flushing cheek. I watched her face—in my keen sense of the beautiful, taking delight in her changeful loveliness—in her artless grace and girlishness.

"I love my brother very much," she murmured, without further answering Geoffrey's question, "and he loves me—dearly."

"I could envy you!" I cried, impulsively; "you must be very happy. The tie between a brother and sister that love one another must be so close—so tender! I can imagine it."

"Imagine it!" echoed Geoffrey, reproachfully. "Ah, Bertha! I do not need recourse to my imagination to know what it is to have a sister." He spoke in a low tone. Somehow the words smote me with a vague pang. Confused and momentary, for it was gone before I could recognise it. Then I was content to blindly bask in the sunshine of his affectionate glance, while the meaning of his words floated from me, and only the music of the caressing tone remained to gladden me. Afterwards,—I remembered.

We sat long into the evening beside Miss Lester's sofa. She grew more familiar with us—less shy and reserved. The innocent girlishness of her nature, as it grew more apparent, ineffably interested me, as I saw it did Geoffrey. I did not wonder at the softened manner and almost tender tone he seemed involuntarily to assume in speaking to her, as he would have done, I thought, with a child. She was like a child, with all a child's winning ways, and, now that

her shyness was gone, all a child's easy, unconventional familiarity.

We were completely to ourselves. During the long August twilight we sat talking gaily—always gaily. The themes of conversation which Geoffrey and I chose when we were alone we each seemed tacitly to agree were too deep—perhaps too sad, for the sunshiny spirit of our visitor; his favourite songs seemed too plaintive, and he whispered me to sing my merriest ballads. I—poor fool, as I moved to the piano, felt an inward delight in thinking that he, as well as I, had a repugnance to our usual converse being shared by any one beside ourselves. After I had finished my song, I still sat at the piano, and the feelings that had been leaping up within me all the day, found vent, almost unconsciously to myself, in wild, dreamy music, such as it was often my habit to improvise. Suddenly it was interrupted by Geoffrey, who came hastily to my side, and whispered in my ear:—

“Don't, Bertha! Your mournful music saddens her. She does not understand it—the innocent child! Sing another of those quaint old ballads.”

I obeyed contentedly. He went back to his seat beside the sofa. As I sang, looking on them both—for his face was turned towards her and away from me, so that I *could* gaze on him—I thought how good he was—how kind! How, with all the nobility and loftiness of manhood, he combined those gentler, tenderer qualities so rarely existing in a masculine nature.

I did him no more than justice: I have always known that, and gloried in knowing it.

I finished singing, went to the window, and looked out on the cold, grey evening sky, and the leaden sea. Everything rested in a heavy, stony calm. No sign remained of the tumult that was past, except in the trees, which had been shaken nearly bare by the fierce wind—the leaves lying thickly on the ground even before they had caught the autumn tint.

“The world seems absolutely stunned after its fit of passion this morning,” said Geoffrey, joining me in my survey; “not a breath of air stirring, and the heavens presenting one blank, moveless mass of cloud. Which do you



consider the finest specimen of weather, Bertha, storm or calm?"

"I like them both," said I, smiling, "in their season."

"Oh, you are an imperturbable lassie on all these questions. If an earthquake were to visit us, I believe you would defend it as being especially Cornish." He spoke in an absent, abstracted way, very different from his usual manner. Presently he resumed:—

"This very hour last night, Bertha, do you remember we were talking together at the drawing-room window, and you were persuading me to be 'good,' and talk to Miss Lester?"

"Yes, I remember. Are you not convinced now of my reasonableness? Don't you feel inclined to take my advice another time?"

"I don't know, Bertha," he said slowly, and with strange seriousness; "I am not sure if——."

He paused.

"Surely your unfounded prejudice has fairly vanished? You like her now, do you not, as well as I do? At least I judged you did, from your manner. No one can help liking her."

He was still silent—his eyes looking far out into the sky, his lip moving as it had a trick of doing when he was thoughtful. I watched him quietly for awhile, then I could not forbear asking what troubled him.

"Troubles me?" he echoed, looking down with his old, kind smile. "What made you think I was troubled, Bertha?"

"You looked so serious—so thoughtful."

"Am I such a rattlepate, then, that the appearance of thoughtfulness sits so strangely on my face as to awaken wonder? This is the penalty one pays for having habitually a large fund of animal spirits, and a knack of always speaking and looking guily. It seems to be considered an impertinence in a fellow like me, when he doffs the cap and bells, and presents the graver side of his nature to the world."

I could not comprehend why he spoke thus, with a degree of bitterness which seemed altogether unjustified by the occasion.

"You, at least, should know me better, Bertha," he resumed, before I could again speak. "You have seen——."



He stopped suddenly. Mary Lester's voice was heard from her remote corner.

"We must not leave her to herself, poor child," said Geoffrey, turning away from me, and hastening to his old seat by the sofa.

When I joined them he was talking merrily, and appearing to take great pleasure in the silvery laughter his sallies evoked from Miss Lester. I was accustomed to his fitful changes of mood, yet I could not quite account for this. However, all trace of discontent or bitterness had vanished now. Never had I known him more completely himself than he was during that evening, until the entrance of Mr. and Mrs. Warburton interrupted us.

Eager inquiries as to Miss Lester's condition then poured in upon her, mingled with scraps of information, from which, at length, we gathered that Mr. and Mrs. Lester would bring their carriage the next day to remove their daughter.

"If she is well enough to go, I suppose?" said Geoffrey hastily, on hearing this: "that proviso is necessary, is it not?" Then turning to Mary he added, "Or are you very anxious to leave your present quarters?"

She returned his smile and shook her head.

"I daresay papa and mamma wish to have me with them," she said; "but I shall be sorry to leave Bertha;—and everybody," she continued, after a pause, "who has been so kind to me."

"As for Bertha," said my step-mother, "she can, if you like, accompany you to F—— for a day or two. Mrs. Lester has been good enough to invite her."

I was completely confounded by this. I was always averse to leaving home and going among strangers, and *now* to leave Oliffe—to leave Geoffrey—to lose, even for a time, my new happiness! I scarcely heard Mary's eager entreaties—I took no heed of her caressing hands clasping mine, as she urged me to return with her next day, and stay at F—— for awhile.

"You don't say a word—you won't look at me. You will never be so cruel as to refuse?" She turned to Geoffrey—"You ask her," she said, "tell her she *must* come. You see,

she is so silent and stern I am afraid to ask for myself any more."

Geoffrey looked dissatisfied. I could see he was not pleased at this new proposition, though he replied laughingly to Mary's appeal.

"I feel flattered that you rate my disinterestedness so highly. You actually, with the fullest confidence, require me to bring about my own bereavement. What is to become of me when you are both gone?"

"Polite, that!" muttered my father, in a perfectly audible growl, "very, to your host and hostess."

"When my time is so short, too. I have been here two months already, and I must soon think of returning." His voice grew melancholy, and he stopped abruptly. I stood—my mind alternating confusedly between joy and pain.

"But you know, F—— is not so far off," said Mary, blushing and hesitating, "and if—if——."

"Poor little Mary isn't used to giving invitations to stray young gentlemen," interrupted my father, laughing; "but I'll come to the rescue, in spite of Geoffrey's civility to me just now. In brief, then, Mr. Lester charged me with a very cordial invitation to you, Geoffrey, understanding that you took an interest in such marine exploits, to stay a day or two at F—— during the pilchard fishing. And as I heard some very portentous murmurings as I came through the town to-day, to the effect that 'pilchards are up,' I doubt not Mr. Lester will press his welcome on you in person to-morrow."

"I am much obliged: it will give me great pleasure," returned Geoffrey, and the hackneyed expressions bore their full meaning in the earnest sincerity with which he uttered them.

"And now will you ask Bertha?" cried Mary, in glee. I reddened—I felt conscious of the interpretation the girl had put upon his previous hesitation.

"You have no need to seek such intercession," I said quickly; "your own request would be sufficient. If you really wish me to return with you to-morrow, I will do so. But I am unused to leaving home, and——."

"You sha'n't say any more, since you have consented,"

broke in Mary ; "it is all settled happily, and I shall sleep in peace."

"She is very fond of you, Bertha," whispered Geoffrey ; "she loves you already. That is well. And I daresay we shall be quite content, staying at F—— for a day or two. I am glad you have agreed to go."

I was glad, too, when I saw he was satisfied. When I went with Mary to her room, she kissed me, and caressingly nestled her head in my bosom.

"Dear Bertha," she said, in her own low pleading tone, "do love me ! I have never had a friend till now, and—and if you will let me I shall love you dearly. Will you ?"

Reserved as was my nature, my heart yearned to the innocent child.

"Ah !" I murmured to myself, as I pressed my lips on her mouth, trembling as it was with girlish eagerness, "*you* will never ask for love, and be denied." There was a kind of sadness, but no bitterness, no thought of envy, in my mind : I felt too proudly secure in my own happiness.

"What do you say, Bertha ?" asked the timid voice.

"I say, dear," I replied, as I turned to leave the room, "that you are one of those blessed creatures whom it is impossible to help loving. Thank God for it, child."

And I left her.

The next morning came. It was a bright day, and when Mary and Geoffrey appeared, they seemed in keeping with the day, so full of joyous life were they both. For myself I was unquiet, disturbed, I knew not why. The serenity of the previous day was gone ; and without being able to fix on any tangible cause, I felt restless, and almost anxious. I thought it accounted for, when my father entered the breakfast room, and stated that Mrs. Warburton was so unwell as to be unable to leave her bed, desiring me to go and see her.

I did so, and found my step-mother—always prone to magnify passing disorders in herself or others—languidly settling herself as a thorough invalid, and declaring that she should not attempt to rise that day, she felt herself so ill.

"And so, Bertha," said she, "you have a very good excuse

for not going to F—— with Miss Lester, which no doubt you will be glad of. Of course, no one could think of your leaving home while I am in such a state. 'The giddiness in my head is intolerable. Reach me that smelling bottle.'

As I left the room, and returned downstairs, I wondered within myself whether it was disappointment or relief that I felt fluttering perturbedly in my heart; but I could not determine whether I was glad or sorry that I was not going to leave home. I felt sorry when, directly I re-appeared, Mary called piteously on me to re-assure her.

"Mr. Warburton says you won't be able to go with me to day. O Bertha, say he is wrong."

"I am grieved," I said, "but Mrs. Warburton wishes me to remain, and of course I cannot think of leaving her."

Nothing could be said to this. There was a blank silence. I could see Mary's eyes grow lustrous with the tears, which to her came as readily as to a child. And I saw Geoffrey, who had been standing by, turn quickly to the open window, and commence pulling the leaves from the honeysuckle branches that twined about the walls.

I was a strange girl, always. I felt no impulse to draw near Mary, and soothe away her disappointment. Very quietly I passed in and out of the room, superintending various domestic arrangements which, from my step-mother's illness, devolved on me. All the while, Mary lay on her sofa, with drooped head and sorrowful eyes, absently turning over the pages of a book; my father leaned back in his easy chair, utterly absorbed by his newspaper; and Geoffrey still stood by the window, and plucked the honeysuckle branch nearly bare.

I went up again to visit the invalid; when I returned to the breakfast room, Mr. and Mrs. Lester were there.

Mrs. Lester kindly expressed her regret at my inability to return with them, and of course, her concern at its cause.

I murmured some indefinite reply to her civilities. I was straining my ears to catch the conversation of the three gentlemen.

"The extreme beauty of the weather," Mr. Lester was formally saying, "offers a favourable opportunity for excur-

sions about F——, and the pilchard fishing began yesterday. As your father's son, Mr. Latimer, I was anxious to have you as a guest; and I cannot but think, under all the circumstances, this present time is the very best adapted for my having that pleasure."

"You are all kindness, sir," said Geoffrey; and his eyes wandering about the room while he spoke, fixed on me. He came to my side.

"Dear Bertha," he whispered, "I scarcely like leaving you, even for a few days. What do you say? Should you like me to stay?"

"No, no," I returned, in perfect sincerity; "pray go: you cannot refuse so cordial an offer."

Yet after all, it was with a pang that I heard him decisively accept Mr. Lester's invitation, and prepare to leave with them. But I thought the pang was natural enough. For a long time the world had seemed darker to me when he was absent. Nay, the very look of a room was altered by his entering or leaving it. It never occurred to me to wonder that all his reluctance in leaving was on my account; and if it had, I should only have seen in it his unselfish tenderness to me,—as I do now.

"If I were not a poor, helpless, lame little thing," said Mary, as she clung to me, before entering the carriage, "I would not leave you, Bertha, in the midst of sickness and trouble. No, that I wouldn't."

She glanced, with a kind of indignant reproach, at Geoffrey, who stood at the carriage door, waiting to assist her into it. I could not bear that any one should, for a moment, judge hardly of him.

"Supposing I sent you off, and wouldn't let you stay with me," said I, smiling: "then you would be obliged to go. And I assure you I should do so. I am much better without anybody."

"Good-by, Mary," cried my father, as he lifted her to her seat in the carriage. "You carry off one visitor with you, at any rate. Make yourself very agreeable, Geoffrey, to make up for the defalcation of the other."

"I cannot hope to do that," said Geoffrey, as he bade me farewell, adding, in a lower tone, "Take care of yourself, dear



Bertha. I shall think about you. I shall be anxious, but I shall see you again soon."

He pressed my hand, bent his frank, loving gaze on my face, and sprang into the carriage, repeating,—“I shall see you again soon.”

And I went back into the house, and with the sound of the departing carriage wheels grinding in my ears, I tried to still the disquietude throbbing in my breast, by dreaming over that last look, and the earnest affection of his last words.

Blessed are they that are beloved, for they possess a power almost divine of creating happiness! What else but that little look, those few words, could have sent such a tide of joy thrilling through me, as drowned for the time even the dreary pain of parting, and made the house less desolate—the utter weariness and blankness of the day that was to go by without *him*, less insupportable?

It was a strange day. I passed it in reading a novel to my step-mother; attending to the various household duties, the mechanical performance of which is oftentimes such a blessing to a woman; and, towards evening, pacing through the shrubberies, thoughtfully. And then I stood on the brow of the cliff, and with the waves' low music murmuring in my ears, I watched the sun set in a glory of purple and gold, on the first day of Geoffrey's absence.

In the evening of the next day he came. I was sitting alone, listlessly turning over the pages of a book I was not reading. I was lost in reverie, and when he burst in at the door I hastily and confusedly pushed the book aside, as if *that* would betray the subject of my thoughts.

“Dear Bertha, how are you? You look flushed and worried. Tell me, do you feel ill?”

I could only falter out a negative. I had been expecting him all day, and yet, now he was come, it gave me all the throbbing excitement of a surprise. I was obliged to lean my head on my hand, I felt so dizzy.

“I am sure you are not well. Surely, as Mrs. Warburton's illness is not of a serious nature, you might be spared for a day or two. It would be such a happiness to us all; and I have here a note, pleading the request,—from—Mary.”



He took from the breast pocket of his coat, a tiny epistle, on which he looked for a minute before he gave it out of his hands into mine. I opened it, and read it. With a great effort, I succeeded in composing myself sufficiently to comprehend its contents—an earnest and affectionate appeal to me and to my father and step-mother, to let Mary fetch me the next day in the little carriage, and drive me back to F——. There was a postscript, in which she said,—“We have planned an excursion to show Mr. Latimer——Castle. on the day after to-morrow, and no one will enjoy it if you are not with us.” When I had finished reading the note, I laid it on the table beside me.

“May I read it?” asked Geoffrey, hesitatingly; and on my assent, he took up the dainty little sheet of paper, and began to decipher the delicate Italian handwriting, bending his head lowly over it. When he came to the postscript he smiled, and seemed to examine very curiously some of the words.

“She was going to write, ‘Geoffrey,’” cried he at last, “and altered it into ‘Mr. Latimer.’ Ah! the child—the child!”

I thought it strange that he should notice the circumstance. I had not. But I did not at the time observe the strange tone in which he murmured the last words, while he carefully refolded the note, smoothed it, and peered at the device upon the seal; and he still kept it in his hand, I remember, while he went on talking.

“Should not you like to come and stay with her? It would make her so happy; she is thoroughly in love with you, Bertha. She won’t be repulsed, even if you could repulse her, which I know you can’t. I wish you would come.”

“It does not rest with me,” I answered.

“She wants you so much,” he continued, abstractedly, and without appearing to notice what I said; “and not only that,—I want you,” he cried, suddenly, raising his head, and looking at me. “Oh, Bertha, I have so much to say to you—so much——.”

“So, so! the bird’s flown back to his old nest!” cried my father, entering the room, newspaper in hand. “Do they treat you so ill at F—— that you can’t stand another night

of it? I protest you look pale and thin! Do they starve you—limit your diet to pilchard soup and potato pasties? Order up something luxuriously edible, Bertha, to revive his sinking energies. Come, have you anything to say, or is your organ of speech famished to death, and have you infected Bertha with dumbness?"

"If it were so," answered Geoffrey, with a loud laugh that startled me, "I am sure you would infect us both back again into a capability of talking. Dear sir," he added, while he cordially grasped his hand, "I need not ask how *you* are. When you grow loquacious, we may be sure all is well. I begin to hope you will accede to the petition I come charged with."

But my father shook his head, and would not listen to the proposed plan. More from habit than affection,—for alas! only child of his dead wife though I was, I had never succeeded in endearing myself to him—he was always averse to my leaving home; and hitherto his humour, in this respect, had harmoniously chimed in with my own. But I felt it hard now, and harder yet when Geoffrey, after fruitlessly arguing the point on all sides, and being invariably met by the same quiet but positive shake of the head, rang the bell for his horse, and took leave.

"You outdo the very stones," he said, with a vexed laugh. "Cornish rocks are not so firmly fixed as your Cornish will. *They* move, some of them—but you! I defy any power to make you swerve one millionth part of an inch from your equilibrium of stiff, stern opposition and refusal. Good-by, Bertha!"—then in a subdued tone—"I shall come again very soon—*very* soon. I wish much to have a long talk, and—shall I carry any message to Mary?"

My father caught the last words, and prevented my reply.

"My love to little Mary," he cried, "and, I say, Geoffrey, don't you flirt with her. I take a great interest in Mary Lester, and I won't have her peace of mind disturbed for all the gay young fellows in Christendom."

"Flirt—with her!"—muttered Geoffrey, with a rising colour, and then he forced a laugh, pressed my hand with nervous vehemence, and was gone.

"He seems to be in a marvellous hurry," remarked my

father. "I wonder if the pilchard fishing is the real attraction. Don't go, Bertha; here's a speech I want you to read to me; it's in small print, and the light is failing. Take it to the window, and throw out your voice, that I may hear every word."

Three days passed, and I saw nothing of Geoffrey; nor did we hear anything from F——. Looking back on those three days, it seems to me that I passed them in a kind of dream, mechanically fulfilling the duties of the time, and wilfully blinding myself to all that might have awakened me from my trance. I was a girl—I had never known what love was, till now. I had never known what absence was, till now. And, moreover, I had all my life been wont, not to subdue my feelings, but only to conceal them; and only God, who sees into the hearts that he created, knows how a hidden passion, a hidden anguish, multiplies and dilates in the dark silence of its prison.

On the fourth day Mrs. Warburton left her room for the first time, and in the afternoon my father drove her out to see some friends who lived a few miles away. Left to myself, I took a book, and hurried down the cliff to my favourite haunt among the rocks. Vividly do I remember the sunshiny glory of that September afternoon, the golden transparency of the air, the peculiar clearness of the sea, which, near shore, appeared one mass of liquid emerald, save where the rocks cast their quaint shadows, like frowns upon its still surface. The brown, jagged line of coast, stretching boldly out on either hand, the curved bay of F—— smiling in the distance, with the grey ruin of the castle on its own steep cliff, sternly outlined against the soft blue sky—all is impressed on my mind more keenly than anything I can see now with bodily vision. I recollect the aromatic odour which rose from the beach, the choughs clustering here and there on the cliffs—and one shining-sailed little fishing-boat, which the lazy breeze scarce caused to move on the quiet sea. I have forgotten nothing.

I sat down on my throne, so high up among the labyrinth of rocks that less accustomed feet than mine would have found it difficult to penetrate thereto. I felt safely alone—

and solitude was felicity to me, then. I folded my hands on my lap, gazed out into the broad ocean, and floated forth into the yet broader sea of my happy thoughts.

It might have been hours—or only minutes that had elapsed, when the stillness was broken by another sound than the drowsy music of the ebbing tide. A voice, the very echo of which made my heart leap, called on my name.

"Bertha! Bertha! are you here? Answer, if you are."

What was it that choked the answer ere it passed my lips? It may have been fate that held me silent—motionless. Another voice, low, and very sweet, spoke next.

"I am quite tired, climbing these terrible precipices. Let me sit down awhile—may I?"

"May you?"

Something in the tone with which those two little words were repeated, smote on my dormant sense, and woke it to keen life. They were very near me now, but the tall peaks of the rocks completely hid them from me. Still they were so near that I could hear every word that passed, though they spoke softly, gently, as lovers, happy lovers should.

"There! That is a proper seat for you, up there, and this is no less fit for me—at your feet. If I raise my eyes I see you—and heaven beyond. Nothing else."

I stood fixed. I listened—I heard all they said—I can hear it *now*.

"Ah, Geoffrey!" it was Mary spoke next—"shall I wake presently? This sunshine, and this emerald sea, and the cloudless sky, it is like what I have seen in dreams—only"—there was a hesitating pause, and then the voice grew trembling and low—"I should never have dreamed you—you loved me."

"Why not? Do you only dream of what you desire?"

She was silent.

"Did you ever dream of loving *me*, Mary?"

"I never thought of it till—till you asked me. And then I asked myself, and—I knew!"

"And did you never guess I loved you?"

"Never! never! I thought you cared for Bertha. If I had discovered my own secret before I knew yours—oh, Geoffrey! what should I have done?"

"Child, child! as if you could ever love in vain!"

"But if I had been right? I thought you loved Bertha."

"What could make you think so? Bertha is my dear friend, my sister. It is so different."

"I am ignorant—inexperienced—I could not detect the difference. And you *do* love her very much, you own it. I could almost be jealous, though I love her myself. I am a foolish little thing. Tell me you love *me* the best!"

"The best! There is no room for positives and comparatives in the world *you* occupy, Mary: you fill it all. It is with another and distinct being, it seems to me, that I care for the few others I know and love. Rest easy, little jealous heart! You have a realm to yourself—it is your own, and can never belong to any one beside."

"Never, never? Are you quite sure? If I were to die——"

"Hush!"

"It is so strange. I wonder if Bertha knew——?"

"Dear Bertha! To think that the first evening you spent at Cliffe she had to coax me into coming to talk with you. Mary! I did not like strangers, and I was cross and cold, and resolved to find you disagreeable. Ah!—what an age seems passed since then."

"Yes."

"It makes me very happy to know that Bertha and you will love one another. She is so good, so noble! The true, earnest character of a woman I would choose from all others to be the friend of my—my *wife*."

There was a silence. How merrily the waves sang as they dashed on the rocks, and how the sunshine glared, reflected in the emerald sea! Then chimed in again the soft girlish voice:—

"I shall be glad when Bertha knows. I hope she will love me—will be my friend, as you say."

"She will, she will, for my sake, as well as for yours, Mary! I was near telling her all, the other evening when I was here. I so yearned to confide in her what I had not then told even to you. But some interruption occurred, and afterwards I was glad I had said nothing. For, in case I had



found that—you did not love me—I could not have endured that even Bertha should have known——.”

“Ah, don’t look so stern, Geoffrey! You frighten me.”

“Am I so terrible?” he rejoined, with a light laugh. “Well, then, we will think of the happiness it will be *now*, when I tell Bertha, and lead you to her kind arms——.”

Somehow, the next words floated from me. It was as if a great tide of roaring waters rushed up into my brain, and drowned all sense for a time. Upon this dull blank, consciousness slowly broke. Piercing the hollow murmur yet resounding in my ears, came a voice, gradually growing more distant. They were going:—

“Let me hold your hand, darling. I must guide you over these rocks. Take care, child, take care!”

And then nothing disturbed the stillness. The waves sang on, the little pebbles glittered in the sunshine, the silver-sailed boat nodded to its shadow in the glassy sea, and I stood gazing in a kind of wonder at my hands, all torn and bleeding, where I had clutched fierce hold of the sharply pointed rocks beside which I had been standing.

\* \* \* \* \*

At the shrubbery gate stood a servant, watching for me. She told me that Miss Lester and Mr. Latimer had been waiting for me all the afternoon,—that they were now in the drawing-room, at tea. I passed through the garden, crossed the lawn, and stood for a moment at the open window before entering. My father and my step-mother were there with them. Mary was leaning back in a great arm-chair,—Geoffrey seated opposite to her,—his eyes restlessly wandering about the room, yet ever returning to her face. A pale fragile face it was, with the drooped eyes, and the long tresses of fair hair floating round it. There was a trembling consciousness in the quivering mouth—in the downcast eyes. I did not dare look longer on her—I stepped into the room.

“Ah, Bertha!” Geoffrey sprang to my side, and clasped my hand; and Mary timidly stole up, and tried to wind her arms round me.

“Go away, all of you!” I cried, releasing myself with a loud laugh; “don’t you see I’m wounded, and must be



delicately handled!" I held out my hands in testimony. "This comes of climbing rocks in a hurry."

"Did you fall—did you hurt yourself?" anxiously asked Geoffrey.

"Yes—both!—I should like some tea," I added, passing to the tea-table, and sitting beside my step-mother.

"Poor thing—I daresay it has shaken you," observed she, ever compassionate to physical ailments.

"Shaken her—Bertha!" repeated my father. "Stuff! I defy any amount of tumble to ruffle Bertha's equanimity. She's a thorough Cornish woman—bred among the cliffs and rocks of our rough coast, till she's almost rock herself. Ar'n't you, Bertha?"

"Quite, sir."

"Not quite," said Geoffrey, seating himself beside me. "Ah, those poor little hands—how terribly they have been cut by the cruel rocks! Why don't you bind them up, Bertha?"

"Ah, let me—let me!" cried Mary. She knelt down at my feet, and drew forth her delicate little cambric handkerchief, and gently took hold of my hand. I held my breath—I might have borne it only I saw the look of his eyes as they were fixed on her. I snatched the hand away, and drew back my chair from her as she leaned against it. She would have fallen forwards, but that Geoffrey's arm was quick to support her, and to raise her to her feet.

"Dear Bertha, did I hurt you?" she inquired—and she *would* persist in hovering round me, locking at me with her affectionate eyes—while *he* watched her, and loved her more, I knew, for her care of me.

"I cannot bear to be touched," I answered; "I am afraid I must forfeit my character of being perfect flint after all—for you see this casualty has somewhat disordered my nerves."

"Nerves!" growled my father; "the first time I ever heard the words from *your* lips. Don't *you* take to nerves, for mercy's sake!"

"There is no fear of that," cried I, laughing; "and pray don't let people alarm themselves about me," I added, looking mockingly on the anxious faces of Geoffrey and Mary;

"I am perfectly able to take care of myself, wounded though I am. I ought to apologise for occupying so much of your time and attention."

"Don't talk like that, Bertha," said Geoffrey, gravely; "you know what concerns you, concerns us!"

*Us!* The word stung me into fury, and I could not trust myself to speak.

"I so regret," said the polite, equable tones of my step-mother, as she turned to her guests, "that we should all have been out when you came. You must have waited here some hours. Such a pity!"

"We went down to the shore to look for Bertha among the rocks," said Geoffrey; "I wonder we did not see you," he continued, addressing me, "since you were there. We called you—we hunted for you. You must have wandered very far."

"Yes," I replied, briefly, "I had."

"I am afraid you are tired," he pursued, in a lower tone, "and yet I do so wish that we may have one of our happy twilight loiterings up and down the shrubbery walk this evening. Will you, Bertha?"

"No, I cannot—I am weary," I said. My own voice smote strangely on my ear, it was so harsh. But he did not notice it—for Mary was speaking to him.

"Mrs. Warburton has no objection—she may come."

"Ah, Bertha! will you come back with us to F—— this evening?" said Geoffrey, with great animation; "that will be better still. Will you come?"

"It is impossible," said I, still quietly; "I cannot leave home."

I had to meet the entreaties of Mary—the anxious remonstrances of Geoffrey. At length they left me, and talked apart together. It was about me, I knew. He was uneasy about me—and thought that my confinement to the house during Mrs. Warburton's illness had been too much for me. He said so, when he came up to me again.

"And I have been thinking that you ought to have some one to take care of you, dear Bertha; and if you do not feel well enough to leave home, Mary shall stay here with you and nurse you. She wishes to do so."

I yet retained enough of reason to keep calm in order to prevent *that* plan's accomplishment. I had half anticipated it—I dreaded that I might presently encourage it—and then! No, I dared not have her left with me. So I whispered to Geoffrey that he must not propose such a scheme—that it would ruffle my step-mother to have an unpremeditated guest in the house that evening—that it could not be:

“Ah, poor Bertha!” he said tenderly; “dear Bertha! Some day she shall be better cared for.”

His pity—his tenderness—maddened me. I started from my seat, and went out into the cool evening air. Mary followed me.

“See, the moon is rising!” cried I, merrily. “Did you ever see the moon rise over the sea from our rocks, down there? Our beautiful rocks!”

“No—let us go there and watch it. Papa and mamma won't be here with the carriage for a whole hour yet, and your papa is going to carry off Mr. Latimer to look at some horses. And I love the rocks—don't you?”

“Ay—the happy, beautiful rocks!”

“Come, then, I know the way.” She ran on before; I followed slowly, vaguely feeling that the air was pleasant and cool to my brow, and that it was easier to breathe out of the house. Before I reached the wicket, through which Mary had already disappeared, I was joined by Geoffrey.

“You said you were too tired to walk with *me*,” he said in smiling reproach; “but you are going with Mary. Well, I forgive you. And, ah! Bertha, let me tell you now——”

“No, no, I can't wait,” I cried; “besides—don't you hear my father calling you? He is impatient—you must go to him directly.”

“Soit!” He turned away shrugging his shoulders with an air of forced resignation. I watched him, till a turn in the path hid him from me, and the sound of his footsteps ceased. I was quite alone in the solemn stillness of the twilight. A faint odour stole from the flowers that nodded on their stems in the evening breeze; the murmur of the waves flowing in on the shore below came hushingly to my ears; and the moon was just breaking from a great white cloud—its beams lay on

the sea in a long trembling column of light. The purity, the peace of the time fell on my heart like snow upon a furnace. There was that within me which was fiercely at war with everything calm or holy. I turned away from the moonlight—from the flowers; and with eyes bent fixedly on the ground, I trod the garden path to and fro—to and fro—*thinking!*—

“Bertha—Bertha! Oh, come!”

A voice, strained to its utmost, yet still coming faintly, as from a distance, called upon my name. I know I must have heard it many times before it penetrated the chaos of my mind, and spoke to my comprehension. Then I knew it was Mary, who had long ago hastened down among the rocks, and who wondered, doubtless, that I did not join her. I paused and listened again.

“Oh, come! Bertha, Bertha, help me!”

The voice sunk with a despairing cadence. What could it mean—that earnest supplicating cry? I was bewildered, at first; and then I thought it must have been my own fancy that invested the dim sounds with such a wild and imploring tone. But I hurried through the wicket and down the path, when, midway, I was arrested by another cry, more distinct now, because nearer.

“Save me! Bertha, Bertha—help!”

Then I understood all. Her inexperienced steps had wandered into one of those bewildering convolutions of the rocks, and the advancing tide now barred her egress. I stood motionless as the conviction flashed upon me. Quick, shrill, despairing came the cries, now.

“Come to me, oh, come and save me! I shall be drowned—drowned. O Geoffrey, Geoffrey! help me! Don’t let me die—come to me, Geoffrey!”

Even in her desperation, her voice took a tenderer tone in calling on his name. And I did not move. Shriek upon shriek smote on the stillness; but well I knew that all ears save mine were far away; that the loudest cry that could come from the young, delicate girl, would never be heard, except by me. Soon, exhausted by her own violence, her voice died away into a piteous wailing, amid which I could catch broken words—words that rooted anew my stubborn

feet to the ground; words that scorched and seared me, and hardened into a purpose the bad thoughts, that at first only confusedly whirled and throbbed at my heart.

"Geoffrey! come quickly to me. I shall die. O Geoffrey! it is so hard to die *now*! Where are you, that you do not come to save me? O Geoffrey! *my* Geoffrey!"

"He will never hear, he is far away," I said to myself; "there is no help for her—none." I felt myself smiling at the thought.

"I am drowning! Oh, the cruel sea—the dreadful, dreadful rocks!" shrieked the voice.

"The beautiful rocks," I muttered; "you said you loved them but a little while ago. It was there that you and he——. Ay, shriek on!"

The advancing tide was not more cruel, the hard rocks more immoveable, than I, as I stood listening, till again the cries subsided into a ~~meaning~~ that blended with the rush of the waves.

"Oh, my mother! my mother! Heaven help me—have mercy on me!"

The voice was suddenly quite hushed. I shivered, and a strange, awful, deadly feeling stole over me. In that minute what an age passed! I know how murderers feel.

But God is merciful—most merciful. Again the supplicating voice rose to my ears, this time like music. I sprang from the ground where the moment before I had crouched, and dashed down the cliff.

My mind was perfectly clear. It has been a blessed thought to me since, that it was no delirious impulse now turned me on my way to save her. I might have been mad before, I was not now. I had full command of my reason, and as I clambered along, I at once decided on the only plan by which I could rescue her. I knew every turn and twist of the rocks, and very soon I gained a high peak, above where she stood, at the farthest corner of a little creek, into which the tide was driving rapidly. There was no time to lose. I slid down the steep, smooth rock to her side. She was nearly unconscious with terror, yet when she saw me she uttered a glad cry, and wound her arms round my neck in her old caressing way. I let them stay there. I tried to



arouse her courage. I told her I would save her, or we would die together. I bade her cling fast to me, and fear nothing; and then, with one arm strongly holding her slender, childish form, and with the other grasping the rocks for support, I waded with her through the waters.

Before we rounded the chain of steep rocks which had shut her in from the shore she fainted. I was very strong. I raised her in my arms, and clasped her close.—I climbed my way with vigour, I never felt her weight. I felt nothing, except thanksgiving that she was living, breathing, safe!

A sound of voices came confusedly from the cliff. I answered with all the power I could, and I was heard. Ere I gained the foot of the cliff, I saw, in the clear moonlight, a figure rushing towards us—Geoffrey. It yet rings in my ears, the terrible cry which burst from him as he beheld the figure lying lifeless in my arms.

“She is living! she is safe!” I cried. I saw the change in his face, as he snatched her from me to his heart. Then I fell at his feet, and knew no more.

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## PART II.

It was a strange sensation, the awakening from what seemed to me a long sleep. I had never had a severe illness in my life before, and when I opened my eyes languidly, and became feebly conscious of myself, I felt a vague wonderment whether I was reviving to the same existence, or to a new one. I tried to remember what I had been—what had happened before the long sleep came, but the mere effort of memory dizzied me, and I closed my eyes again, and lay passive, till a stir in the room aroused me.

I felt some one draw near me. I looked, and saw Mary bending over my bed.

The innocent face, the soft eyes, brought all back to my mind. I could not suppress a low cry, as I hid my face, and turned from her—*remembering!*

She, poor child! uttered fond, soothing words to me, while



her tears fell on my hands, my shrunken, pallid hands, which she clasped in her own, and ever and anon pressed lovingly to her lips. Then she gently raised my head, and supported it on her bosom. I had no strength to move away. I was constrained to lie still, and bear her caresses, only closing my eyes, that they might not meet the tender, steadfast gaze of hers.

"My darling, my darling Bertha," she kept saying, "you are better, you will be well now, thank heaven!"

And she, with her soft, cool hands, smoothed the hair from my forehead, and then kissed it.

"You know me, don't you, dear?" she asked, presently. "You will say one word to me?"

"What has been the matter?" I said, startled by a sudden fear. "Have I been ill—delirious?"

"Hush, darling! Keep quite still and quiet. No, you have not been so ill as that; and now I trust there is no danger of it. But we were afraid."

I sighed—a deep sigh of relief. I heard her saying more, and I gathered from her words, interrupted as they were by tears and sobs, that I had broken a blood-vessel, and that they had for some hours despaired of my recovery.

"And it was for me, for me," she went on; "it was in saving me you nearly lost your life. O Bertha! if you had died!"

A passionate burst of weeping choked her voice. I repeated softly to myself:—

"If I had died!—ah, if I had died!"

"It would have broken our hearts," sobbed Mary,— "mine and—and Geoffrey's. We should never have been happy again. Poor Geoffrey!" she repeated, arousing herself suddenly, "I am forgetting him in my own gladness. He has been waiting and watching in such terrible anxiety. I must run and tell him. Let him come and speak to you at the door."

"No, no!" I cried, clutching her dress to detain her. "You must not. I cannot—I cannot bear it."

I was too feeble to assume the faintest semblance of composure. Even when I caught her look of innocent surprise, I could not dissemble any the more. I fell back, closing my

eyes, and hardly caring whether she suspected or not. But hers was too transparent a nature to suspect. She smoothed my pillow, and kissed my hot brows with her fresh lips—blaming herself the while, in low murmurs, for her thoughtlessness in exciting me. Then, she stole softly out of the room.

Geoffrey must have been waiting in the next chamber. I heard his voice, uplifted in a rapturous thanksgiving—his voice, blessing God that I was saved! Somehow, it fell on my heart with a strange pang, which yet was not all pain; and, like a thick cloud breaking and dissolving into rain, a heavy choking sob burst from me; and I wept blessed, gentle tears, such as I had never yet known. And then, exhausted, like a troubled child, I fell into a deep sleep.

When I awoke, I heard subdued voices in the room. I distinguished Dr. Ledby's grave tones, pronouncing that I was now out of all danger; that I should recover—slowly, perhaps, but surely. Then I felt some one come and hang over me as I lay, and, languidly opening my eyes, I saw my father gazing on me, with more affection expressed in his face than I had ever dreamed he cherished for me. It sent a thrill to my heart, half pleasure half remorseful pain, for the bitter things I had sometimes thought of his want of love for me.

"I am awake, father," said I; and he kissed me tenderly, and with great emotion.

"We have been in much trouble about you, child," said he, hoarsely. "We thought—we thought——."

He broke off, and turned hastily away. Then my step-mother came. Even she, cold and impassive as was her disposition, showed kindness, almost tenderness towards me now. She busied herself in settling my pillows, brought me a cooling draught, and in various ways testified her interest and solicitude. And she was habitually so indolent and indifferent, that such trifling offices assumed quite a new importance in her.

"Now then," said she, sinking down in a chair, when her labours were concluded. "I will sit by you for awhile. Your nurse is taking a walk in the shrubbery, by Dr. Ledby's desire. Poor child! she was quite pale and worn with watch-

ing so anxiously ; and Geoffrey fairly dragged her out of the house."

"I can see them now, walking together in the laurel path," said my father, who was standing at the window. "They are talking earnestly enough. They make a pretty pair of lovers."

I could see them, too,—though my eyes were closed. I kept silence.

"Bertha, my dear," added he, walking to my bedside again, and assuming something of his old manner, "are you prepared to be a heroine in these parts?—to have your name immortalised in guide-books, and mispronounced by garrulous old women? I hear they already call that creek 'Bertha's,' and that rock 'The Escape.' And you may expect an ode and two or three sonnets, in the next *Cornish Luminary*."

I smiled. It may have been a very sickly smile, for my father again turned away, and again grew unwontedly grave.

"We must not talk too much to our invalid," considerately said he.

And with great caution he quitted the room. My remaining companion sat mute, and sorted her wools ; while I lay, with clenched hands, and head buried in the pillow, and had time to think, and to remember, and to look forward. But I could do neither. Mentally, as well as physically, I was so weak that I was unable to penetrate the confused haze which enshrouded my thoughts. And in the vain endeavour to cleave through this chaos, consciousness partly floated from me, and, without being asleep, I lay as if in a dream, knowing where I was, and all that was passing around me, but in utter abeyance of all thought. In this state I heard Mary enter the room. I felt her come and look at me. Then followed a whispered conversation with some one else. Then—then—Geoffrey stood at my bedside. I felt him there—his gaze fixed on my face. Once he touched my hand—he pressed his lips on it. Emotion seemed frozen within me. I lay passive the while—conscious of all, but still and quiet. It was as if I were dead, and he bending over my corpse.

"Bless her—God bless her!" said he, presently, in a strangely broken and suppressed voice. "But for her, oh, Mary! what had been my life now?"

"Hush, darling!" came in the timid tones of Mary; "you will awaken her."

He turned to her. In my strange waking trance, I seemed to see how he took her in his arms, and looked into her face. For a little time there was silence.

"God is very good," said he at length, "to have given two such dear ones to me, Mary, and to have preserved them both through the peril that threatened them. If even after you were saved, Bertha had died——."

"Oh, terrible, terrible!" murmured Mary, shuddering. "Ah, dear Geoffrey! that would have been worse than all; far, far worse than if I——."

"No, darling—there could be no worse than that."

Very quietly they talked, with a subdued and solemn cadence in their voices. Like tones heard in a dream it all fell on my ears—to become afterwards a remembrance more distinct than the reality.

"How pale and still she is!" whispered Mary. "And how altered since this illness. She was so full of life and energy when I first saw her. Only a few short weeks ago, Geoffrey, do you remember?"

"Yes, dear, I remember well."

"How different her face is now. O Geoffrey!" She stopped, weeping. He soothed her tenderly, as a mother might a petted child.

"To think that but for me all this sorrow had never been," faltered she. "Bertha would have been spared this suffering had I never come to Cliffe."

"Do you wish you had never come to Cliffe, Mary?" asked his low, fervent voice.

"Ah, no—no! If you do not."

"I? Heaven forgive me, darling! but a whole world of misery would seem to me a cheap purchase of what I have won."

He spoke passionately, impetuously, and she was quick to calm him.

"Hush," she said, gently, "you will waken poor Bertha."

But I did not wake. I lay still and placid—soulless, as it seemed, and pangless, long after they had left me.

My memory of the next few days is vague and uncertain.

I was kept very quiet, rarely spoke, and remained, for the most part, motionless and with closed eyes, so that they often thought me asleep when I was only thinking.

Mary was constantly with me. Her love was devoted, untiring. It would not be discouraged by coldness, and it seemed content to be unreturned. She was the tenderest, the most watchful of nurses. And every one was very kind to me. My father, my step-mother; all those of whom I had thought so hardly that they did not care for me. Sometimes now, I reflected remorsefully, that if they had not hitherto shown me much affection it might have been my own fault. I had no right to quarrel with natures for being over-reticent.

Geoffrey sent me the freshest flowers every morning, and scoured the country for fruits and delicacies to tempt my appetite. And once or twice he came in to see me. These interviews were very brief—very silent. No one wondered—I was still so feeble.

I regained strength but slowly. It was long before I left my bed. And the autumn was far advanced when for the first time, my father carried me downstairs into the cheerful sitting-room, and laid me on the sofa near the window.

I looked out into the garden; saw the trees wearing their golden tints; the laurels in the shrubbery waving about in the wind; the little wicket gate; beyond that, the cliff; beyond still, the great sea, flashing in the noon sunlight. I remembered the last time I had passed out at that gate on to the cliff.

Mary was beside me, busied in some tender cares for my comfort. With a sudden impulse I passed my arm round her. It was the first expression of the new and softer feeling rising in my heart for her.

Poor child! she nestled her head in my bosom, weeping in a torrent of gratitude and joy. She must have been often cruelly wounded by the kind of sullen endurance with which hitherto I had received all her tenderness. For it was long before her patient love won its way and softened my rebellious heart. But she could not tell—she could not guess. It must have been a mystery to her, always—the strange fitful humour of my love for her, which one minute would make me



clasp her in a passionate embrace, and the next, gently but irresistibly put her from me.

As I did now. I had struggled—God knows I had!—I had battled with the fierce tides of feeling that ever and anon surged within me, convulsing my whole being, feeble as I was, till the little vitality I had remaining, seemed to leave me. I had learned the new lesson of striving against myself—against the strongest, wildest part of my nature. But I was young yet, and the instincts of youth are so passionate, so uncontrollable. They rebel so fiercely against suffering—they *will* shriek out, and dash themselves impotently against the strong despair, even until it stuns them into silence.

And I untwined Mary's clinging arms, and turned my head away from her. She sat contentedly beside me, playing with my hands, which she kept possession of.

How thin they were, and pallid! When I looked at them, after awhile, and then at Mary's, what a contrast! She was amusing herself by taking the rings from her own fingers and placing them on mine. There was one—an opal set among diamonds—which sparkled brightly.

"A pretty ring," said I, languidly, taking it to look more nearly at it; "I never noticed it before."

"No," said Mary, drooping her head, shyly; "I—I never had it till last evening."

I gave it back to her. She tried to put it on one of my fingers, but they were all too shrunken, and it slipped off.

"'Tis of no use," said I, and I drew my hand away; "it is a faithful ring, and will only be worn by its mistress." And again I turned my face and gazed out.

"Don't look away from me," said Mary, pleadingly, "because—because I want to tell you—this ring—Geoffrey gave me."

"I know," I answered quickly; "I understand—all. You need tell me nothing."

She seemed relieved, and scarcely surprised. For a moment she looked in my face, her own cheeks all flushing, and her eyes only half raised from the shadow of the lashes. Then she fell weeping on my neck.

"Tell me—tell me you are not sorry," she said, brokenly; "he is so good, and I—oh, I am so unworthy. You knew



him long before I did, and you must know how noble he is, and how little I deserve him. But—but I love him, Bertha!”

She raised her head, and looked up straight into my eyes, as she uttered the last words. I pressed the tearful face down again upon my bosom hastily but gently.

“I love him!” she again murmured, in a kind of childish dalliance with the words; “I love him dearly!”

I said, after a little while, “Then, Mary, is there no need to fear your worthiness;” and I mechanically repeated the lines:—

“Behold me, I am worthy  
Of thy loving, for I love thee! I am worthy as a king.”

“Is that true—is it really so?” she asked, earnestly; “loving much, do we merit much? Because,”—and again her cheek crimsoned, and her voice sank timidly—“*then* I know I should deserve him. Who could love him so well as I?”

She had crept closely to me. It was almost more than I could bear. I moved uneasily upon my pillow, disengaging myself from her embrace.

“I am tired,” was all I could say: “I should like to sleep.”

But her sweet look of innocent self-reproach for having wearied me, smote on my heart. When, after carefully arranging my cushions and coverings, she stole quietly away, I called her back. She knelt down at my side, and unsuspectingly the clear, untroubled eyes were raised to mine. I parted the hair on her brow, and twisted the fair tresses listlessly in my fingers.

“I am weak still, dear,” I said, the while, “and peevish, and capricious often. But you are very patient; you will forgive me.”

She was eager with deprecatory words; but I would not heed them. I kissed her tenderly, solemnly; bending over her, as I whispered the words:—

“God look on you, and love you always!—you and Geoffrey!”

And when I was alone, I prayed the same prayer.

Very gradually I regained strength. I do not care to

dwell upon the time of my early convalescence. When I was well enough to need no nursing, Mary returned home; but she came to see me every day, and she was almost more at Cliffe than at F——. Geoffrey would go to fetch her in the morning, and escort her home in the evening: when he returned, I had always retired to my room, so that I saw but little of him, though he was still, nominally, my father's guest.

He was most kind, and affectionate to me as ever. If the close and confidential intercourse of old was at an end, it was only natural, and I was very grateful that it should be so.

He had never spoken to me of his engagement with Mary, till one evening, in the dusky twilight, they both came together to my sofa from the window, where they had been for some time talking in low whispers, and Geoffrey, pressing my hand in both of his, told me that he had that day arranged with Mr. Lester—that they were to be married early in the New Year, and that in a day or two he was going to London to see his lawyers.

Mary hid her tearful face in my bosom the while he told me this. I was glad it was so dark.

“And next week I shall go,” repeated Geoffrey, “and then—I shall leave Mary in *your* charge, Bertha; and you in hers,” he added, as an after-thought. “Poor little invalid! she cannot take care of herself yet,” he went on, half playfully, half in tender earnest. “I must not burden her with the keeping of my treasure. But I am glad I leave you together.”

“And you will not be long away,” said Mary, pleadingly; you will come back very soon? And then Bertha will be quite well—won't you, dear?”

“Yes,” said Geoffrey, answering for me; “and able to go with us to Italy. That is what we have planned, dear friend—dear sister. Does it please you?”

I was more than half prepared for some such proposal. I did not attempt to combat it then, and my murmured answer, unintelligible as it was, satisfied him. He went on gaily:—

“Do you remember how we used to talk of Rome, and Venice, and Naples, and long to see them—to visit them together, Bertha? Who would have thought our dreams so

near realisation? Ah!" he continued, with a deep sigh of content, "the world is a better world than I thought it, and life has a great deal of happiness—more than I ever dreamed!"

He paused for a moment. Mary's little hand stole into his.

"I am very happy, too," whispered she; "but not *quite* content—till Bertha is well."

"But Bertha will be well—shall be, *must* be," he cried, in a tone almost of defiance. "My darling's heaven must be cloudless. There shall not be a speck upon it."

"Hush—hush, dear!" she said, timidly; "don't talk so—it is not right. And besides, Bertha is weak, remember." She was always so thoughtful over me! I felt that, and was grateful, even then.

"Dear Bertha," he said, in compunction, "you know my old sins of feverish thoughtlessness. Do I tire you? Shall I go away?"

\* "No; I am stronger—stronger than I was. Stay."

The words came forth very faintly and gaspingly, though I tried hard to steady them. He ~~was~~ silent for awhile.

"Dr. Ledby says you will recover fast now," he presently said, as if re-assuring himself; "and Naples is the place, of all others, for you to winter in. Think of Naples and Vesuvius, Bertha! Think of the Bay, at which your beloved F—— Bay will have to hide its diminished head for evermore. You will never dare sing its praises again—obstinate patriot though you are."

"And at Naples," added Mary, "we shall meet my brother."

"Ay—there's the grand crisis of delight in *her* mind," cried he, in assumed peevishness; "it's always that brother Arthur, to whom I take exception from the beginning. I know I shall hate him. You have no business to have a brother—nor anything—but *me*."

Mary laughed merrily. She never noticed the shade of earnestness which I could trace through all his jesting.

"Ah, Bertha," she said, "*you* will like Arthur, I know. *You* are not unreasonable and prejudiced. And he is so good—so clever, too, and——."

"Oh, you inscrutable little schemer!" interrupted Geoffrey; "do you always make a rule of showing your plans be-

forehand? This dangerously artful person—this terribly manœuvring match-maker—don't you see, Bertha—can't you guess? Ah, you won't answer; but I wish it was light enough to see you smile."

"Be quiet, Geoffrey," urged Mary.

"Oh, I promise you infinite amusement in this young lady's budding diplomatic talents," he persisted. "As for me, I know the programme of her plot by heart—as I ought, having heard it so often. She is quite a female Macchiavelli, I only wish I were going out on a mission: what an invaluable secretary she would be to my ambassadorship!"

"I will give you a mission," said she, laughingly—"go and get Bertha some grapes. Her hands are quite hot, and I know your talking is too much for her. Go away, and ask Mrs. Warburton for a bunch."

She pushed him playfully towards the door, through which at length he departed, grumbling, and appealing to me against her tyranny.

I did not see him again that night. Before he returned with the grapes, I had gained my own room, where I was glad to be quiet and at rest.

After that day, I noticed that a certain shade of pensiveness appeared to hang over both the lovers, as the time of their first separation drew nigh. Geoffrey grew thoughtful often, while watching Mary as she worked, or read, or lay on an ottoman by my sofa, one of her fair arms thrown around me, as she loved to remain, her head half raised, and her loving face peering forth from the midst of her curls. So we were sitting, the very evening before Geoffrey's departure, and I remember how he looked at her, as he stepped into the room from the garden, where he had been pacing the terrace with quick, firm strides for more than an hour. He stopped for a moment on the threshold, gazing on her with eyes whose deep, wild love it seemed to me must have thrilled her—all unconscious as she sat. Then, as I furtively watched his face from under my trembling hand, I saw a changed expression come upon it—an expression of keen, vivid anguish. I had never seen such a look on *his* face before, and it appalled me—smote me out of my forced, stony self-possession. I started up, with a suppressed cry.

"Geoffrey—Geoffrey! what ails you?"

He glanced rebukingly at me, as Mary rose hastily to her feet, and looked alternately at me and at her lover, her whole frame shaking with alarm.

"Bertha, have you wakened out of a bad dream?" he said, while he drew her to his side, and soothed away her fright—"that you horrify this poor child thus?"

I sank back again on my cushions, and closed my eyes.

The poor frightened child hung sobbing on his breast. For a few minutes they did not heed me, and I had time to restore myself to my habitual composure before Mary, breaking from his arms, came to me again.

"Darling Bertha, you terrified me so! Tell me, of what were you dreaming?—that some harm had come to Geoffrey?"

"I hope so, fervently," he broke in, with his old vivacious manner. "I have great faith in the proverb about dreams being fulfilled contrariwise. There could not be a better omen for my approaching journey than that you or Bertha should dream I had broken my neck."

Mary shuddered.

"Oh, don't talk so!" she murmured; "and don't wish us to have such dreams. Think, when you are gone, how dreadful——."

Her voice died utterly away, and she buried her face in my bosom. Again Geoffrey looked on her with that same look which I had scarce strength to endure. Then he turned away, and strode to the window. There he remained, looking out on the wintry, stormy world of sea, and cliff, and snow-covered moor—until Mary rose from beside me, and trying to laugh at her own foolishness, ran from the room to hide her freshly-gathering tears.

Geoffrey approached me hastily, even as the door closed upon her. He seized my hand with almost fierce earnestness, and looked down upon me, his face quite wild with agitation.

"Bertha, Bertha! I always feared this happiness could not last. I believe each human soul has its portion allotted from the beginning of its existence—and I—I have drunk mine to the dregs already."



I suppose the expression of my face struck him then, for he stopped suddenly, then resumed:—

“I am a thoughtless brute, I feel, in talking to you thus—poor, weak, and ill as you are. But, heaven help me! I feel such a yearning to give vent to this dismal feeling—this sense of foreboding that has come upon me! And Mary—it would kill her if she guessed! I must needs practise hypocrisy with *her*.”

“But you must not with me.” I said, rising with a sudden effort. “Tell me all that is troubling you. It will do you good to talk unrestrainedly. And you need not fear for me: I am quite strong, and very calm. Now, speak!”

“Blessings on you, my Bertha—my sister!” he said, with a grateful tenderness that for a moment overset my boasted calmness. “Ever since I knew you, you have always been the refuge for my cares—my fits of depression; and you have always done me good. What should I do without you, Bertha?”

“Go on,” I said; “tell me what you have to tell, for we may be interrupted. Mary will return.”

At the name, his face again grew darkened with a strange gloom.

“How shall I tell you?” he said, hoarsely; “you will not laugh at my weakness—you will understand and pity it. Bertha, do you believe in presentiments?”

He looked fixedly at me, but without waiting my reply, proceeded in a lower, yet more distinct tone:—

“For two days I have been conscious of a strange burden on my mind—a mysterious prescience of some ill to come, I don’t know of what nature. Whether any ill is pending to me, or——No! not to Mary—not to *her*—but——.”

He paused abruptly, and sat as if thinking for awhile. I tried to speak; I could not—I could only remain still, looking at him.

“Did I ever tell you,” he suddenly resumed, “about my poor friend Sinclair? He was about to be married, and a week before, he caught a fever, and died on the very day fixed for his wedding.”

Still I said nothing. But the glance he gave me, taught me something of the look that my own face wore.



read." He paused an instant and drew breath. "It was my uncle's will, which they had vainly sought, and could not find."

"Yes—but—I do not understand——." She faltered, for she saw in his face ample interpretation of all the rest.

"It was a will in his own handwriting, dated a very few weeks before his death. A will, by which he leaves all his property in the charge of trustees, for the benefit of charities in Blishford, and elsewhere; but especially to found institutions, hospitals, and asylums in that wretched town. You see, Rosamond, my schemes were anticipated. Remorse came to the poor old man, and a yearning to do something by his death that might alleviate the wretchedness he had helped to increase during his life! God knows the secrets of his heart; it was not all hard."

"But *you*?" The word flew forth in a sharp, harsh whisper.

"I and Agnes are mentioned in the will—five hundred pounds are left to each of us. Also, inclosed with it was a letter to his former partner in Calcutta, recommending me to him. It was always his wish that I should go there."

"Leonard! don't speak in that manner! Leonard! Leonard!" She turned upon him her pale, agonised face. She caught his arm feebly, looking round with an imploring, searching look. "Wait a little, I cannot, cannot understand yet."

"Rosamond!"

"No, no," she cried hastily, "don't try to tell me."

He put his arm round her, but, in the action, his calmness fled from him. He leaned his head down on his hands; he hid his face. One sudden, passionate groan escaped him. Then was silence, through which they could hear Mr. Bellew's voice, grave, deliberate, and decided, and the children's musical treble blending with it. Twice Rosamond tried to speak, but the words died away, unuttered. A strange, almost fierce look, unnatural to see on her girlish face, quivered about every feature. At last she whispered:—

"Will this separate us? Do you mean that?"

"Do I mean it?"

"Because," she went on, hurriedly, but still in a whisper,

"if it is done, it will be done by you. There is no one else to do it; no one—no one else who could——." She stopped.

Leonard looked up. With her two little hands she clasped his brow so that he could not look at her. And the mutinous, half-frenzied look still grew, and grew.

"It is not right, it cannot be right," she said mechanically. "God could never intend——."

"Hush! Let us look steadily at our fate; let us meet it, since it must be met,—submissively."

"What is our fate to be, then?" she asked, abruptly; "it is for you to decide."

He did not understand her meaning, though he thought he did.

"No, Rosamond, it is for neither you nor me to decide. It is already fixed."

"Does any one know of—of this will beside you?" she said, quickly.

"No one. The person who must first be informed lives in London. I shall go to him to-morrow."

"No!" she said, imperatively, and paused. "No," she said again, imploringly, frightened at Leonard's silence.

"Rosamond!"

"We—we could do all he wished," she whispered, while a burning spot rose on each cheek, "even as you planned before, before you found——. It would be no wrong done to any human being. Leonard, Leonard!"

He drew her closely to him, and kissed her forehead with a sad, tender pain expressed in his look.

"Leonard! O, speak to me!"

"Wait. Think a little."

"Think!" She broke from his arms, and looked up in his face in cold reproach. "Can *you* think of what is the issue of all this? Do you love me less entirely then, than I love you? Anything, everything, is to me better, nobler, truer than that we should part. *We!* It is not one little month since we first learned to say that word. I had known it and uttered it in my heart, long, long before. I knew you *must* love me by the very strength of my own love. I knew we were one. Heaven made us so. Yet you would part us! You could bear to do it!"

"I could bear to do it," Leonard repeated slowly, looking at her, "*because we are one.*"

She stretched out her arms in a sort of helpless, passionate appeal. Her hand touched the crimson rose, smiling in gorgeous fulness and completeness from its crystal vase. She looked at it for a minute, then—her face changed. The dilated eyes softened, the fiery spot faded from her cheek. The frantic passion was dying out. The first instinct of rebellion was yielding to the truer, purer, woman-nature. She bent her head down into her hands.

"We were so happy, so happy. God pity us!" she said; and the tears came plentifully and tenderly. And Leonard, in his soul, cried "God help us, strengthen us!" For he needed both help and strength. In a little while she knelt closely beside him, her head leaning on his breast, weeping out the passion that had burned so fiercely as to convulse the delicate frame wherein it flamed. Presently, when Leonard spoke, his low voice seemed gradually to still the sobs. She looked up—with the old sweet look, that for him her face had always worn. It almost struck down his courage to see it. With a flash came the thought of the coming life—life without *her*. What that meant to him, only his own heart could tell. For a brief space he wrestled with that heart. It was mutinous, it resisted the crushing fate that loomed heavy and dark before it. All the strong passion of his man's nature roused itself, and rebelled against the suffering. It fought fiercely, it struggled with desperate strength. It cried out against the weary years; the desolate cruel time that was coming. How often do we recoil thus from *the time that is coming*. Why do we not remember that we live in eternity, and so,—be patient?

Some such thought came to Leonard, and helped to still the tumult. And Rosamond did not guess what had passed during those moments that he remained so still,—shading his face with his hand. She did not know all the meaning of the uplifted look with which he turned to her again. And he only said:—

"Rosamond, my Rosamond! We will have courage." Then they heard the children calling them.

"I will not go back, in there," Rosamond said faintly.

She laid her hand on the side-door that led into the corridor. But suddenly, she remembered—what it would be when next she saw him, and she shrank back with a low cry.

He bent over her. He folded her in his arms. As a mother that yearns to her child, with a tenderness as pure, a sorrow as sacred, Leonard held his betrothed closely strained to his heart. Again he said, and with a kind of stern resolve, as to himself:—

“We will have courage!”

Then he let her go.

---

#### CHAPTER THE SIXTH.

Two months more, and Leonard Ross was on his way to India. He only waited for his sister's marriage. Then he went. There is little need to relate the history of those two months. For Rosamond they held much strife, struggle, and passionate but impotent resistance. It was Leonard who had to teach her what he, alas! needed all his strength of manhood to recognise with submission; that in patience and power of endurance lay their hope, and not in rebellious strivings against the inevitable. That it was inevitable they both felt, Leonard from the first, and Rosamond later: there was no possibility of tampering with the circumstances before them, unless by a dereliction from that straight path of truth and honour which had ever been the roadway of Leonard's life.

So, they parted. Parted, knowing in how full, and deep, and wide a sense of parting. Agnes, married to her sailor-lover, would be wandering about the world for years to come,—that link of possible communication was broken. And Mr. Bellew in the midst of his bland courtesy, contrived to take his measures decisively and surely. Very soon after the disclosure of what he called “the truly extraordinary circumstances of the case,” he removed his household to an estate of his in Cornwall. He laid down no stringent rules, he impressed no stern commands; but with the quiet, cruel, cold

shrewdness which ever went hand in hand with his indomitable will, he *insured* the absolute and entire cessation of all intercourse between his daughter and her lover. Rosamond, high-spirited and resolute as she was, could not combat with the experienced and gentlemanly scheming that her father employed when he chose. Leonard was almost equally at fault; for, though he knew the character he had to cope with, it was only with the theoretical knowledge that the penetration of a good man has into the nature of a worldly and designing one.

Mr. Bellew gained credit for much magnanimity in permitting Leonard to write once, once only, before he left England. The letter was written, but it never reached her. She saw that the ship had sailed in which she knew he was to go. She even heard of his embarkation from poor Agnes, bridal Agnes; torn between conflicting joy and grief, the union with her lover, and the parting with her brother.

After that, a blank. The grave itself, it seemed, could not have divided them more surely.

In the solitude of the wild seashore, with her little sisters for her companions, Rosamond learned acquaintance with the face of her sorrow. There the quiet capacity to endure, grew and waxed strong upon the ashes of the fiery emotions which had at first spent her strength. Leonard had said, in almost the last words his voice had borne to her:—

“Have no fear. We can bear it.”

Nevertheless, there were seasons of exquisite pain—of ineffable weariness and desolation, when the face of Consolation was hid, and the presence of Peace was no longer with her. Seasons of doubt, of self-upbraidings—when she could fain have called herself traitress to the great truth of her life; and in bitterness and scorn looked on the submission which she had learned so hardly. But one doubt never came to her—the cruelest, the worst pang was spared. Next to her trust in Heaven, was her faith in Leonard. After all, she who loves thus, is happy.

Meanwhile, there came many suitors to Miss Bellew, and even when her youthful radiance had faded, as it did fade sooner than it should have done, many came. And her father chafed wrathfully at the whimsical obstinacy of woman-

nature, but nodded his head wisely the while, saying, "In time—oh, in time!"

At length, one strange, wonderful day, there came to Rosamond a letter. Leonard wrote, openly and with no attempt at disguise—it was singular that, so sent, the letter ever reached her. But it came—she had it, this absolute, tangible, visible speech from him to her. Only a few words—but there could be no more to Rosamond than they held for her. He said—"Tell Mr. Bellew I have written. I do not seek to deceive him, as you know, my Rosamond. But I must write, I will write. Something must go from me that your eyes will look on, that your heart will receive. Soul to soul we are together, but while we live otherwise than in the soul, we crave for more, and the humanity is strong within me, and cries loudly." Little more than this—but it was enough. It lit her life for many, many months. Moreover, she wrote back openly, as he had done, and never knew that Mr. Bellew, grown more cautious and acute for his former negligence, did not suffer the letter to go. More than once in the years that followed, letters were intercepted by the watchful, inexorable old man. Rosamond never knew—never suspected.

So the years went on. The two little girls grew up, and one after the other, the elder sister saw them leave her. Her brother was at the head of the great mercantile house of Bellew, and at last the old merchant retired with his eldest daughter to an estate he had lately purchased, and which he had settled on Rosamond. There the old man lingered out his remaining days, and there he died. In his last illness, like many another man, he grew more lenient. In the shadow of death the things of this world assumed juster proportions—and other things, it may be, looked larger and shone more clearly. Howbeit,—with his daughter's hands clasped close in his, he told her of the detained letters—from the first to the last, which fell into his hands some months back. She did not shrink from him as he had fearfully anticipated. Her quiet eyes looked at him steadfastly. She only said:—

"I knew he must have written. He said he would."

She kissed him, stopping the murmured words in which he



entreated her to forgive him.. And, after a long silence between them, she shyly and softly asked him, Where were the letters? Might she not see them?

They were destroyed—all but the last. That, by some accident, had lain among the papers in his desk ever since its arrival. And that—that single treasure Rosamond had for blessing and comfort. The old man wept senile tears when he saw the flash of joy in her face as she reclaimed it. He had been wrong—he had dealt hardly with them both. Were the time to come over again, they should have been made happy. He would have acted differently. Leonard should not have gone. “But now—now,” moaned he, “it is too late. I have worked the misery of both. I shall leave you desolate and unhappy, my child—my good, dutiful daughter. Would to heaven I had not separated you!”

“He comforted!” said Rosamond, simply: “I am not desolate—we are neither of us miserable. And—and you did not *separate* us, papa. You could not.”

He hardly understood her. He looked inquiringly into her face, wherein the beautiful light of faith, and proud, contented love made the soft eyes to glisten, and the brow to shine purely. No, he could not understand it; but it was true. He had not separated them. There is a perfection of love over which neither absence nor circumstance has power. The intervening space of half a world cannot divide it, nor the lapse of a lifetime subdue or alter it. Such a love triumphs over Time, and creates its own destiny. No convulsion of Fate can rend asunder its divine unity. Apart may flow the external current of the two lives; but if they be united at the source they are *one*, though the world's eyes behold differently, and do not understand. In God they are together, and they feel that, and know it, and may give thanks. Better such a love, with all the pain, and trial, and sore yearning of the earthly and material separation, than many a fate we look on as most happy;—sanctified by marriage, “made one” before the world, but in heart and in soul divided beyond the power of the universe to bring together.

Let those who love worthily be patient. There are harder things to bear than absence in the flesh. Disunion of the

spirit is the only fatal ill that Love has need to shrink from. To meet all the rest, go forth bravely, and endure to the end, for they that *do* love worthily, bear with them an immortal blessing that must outlive all evil.

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## CHAPTER THE SEVENTH.

It was nine years after Leonard Ross had left England for India, that Mr. Bellew died.

Then Rosamond was alone, and she wrote to tell him so.

“ I am alone, Leonard. Papa is dead. He knew that I should write to you—he gave me your last letter, so that I know where you are. The others I never had. It does not matter, and he grieved for it. He was changed much—he became quite like the papa I loved when I was a little thing—before he grew so rich.

“ You will come to me now, my Leonard. I am grown old and altered—for these years have been all shade, though the storms ceased long ago; but I think God has kept some sunshine for us, even till now. I look back on the long time since I heard your living voice saying to me, ‘ We can bear it,’ and I think I am content all should have been as it has been.

“ Always your

“ ROSAMOND.”

This letter sent, she waited patiently. Sometimes the thought of his coming back to her, made her heart throb as if it had not quite forgotten its old pulsations of joy. Sometimes, too, anxious, heavy thoughts would come of possible ill that might yet——. No doubt of him—no doubt, either, of the Infinite Goodness that watched over them both. But human hearts are human still, and even when we say “ Thy will be done ” most submissively, there must be times when the humanity within us cries sorely against the spirit.

She lived a very quiet, solitary life, only different from what it had been before her father's death, inasmuch as her close and devoted attention to him being remitted, she had

more time to give to the charities and other beautiful and womanly duties with which her life was lustrous. The Lady of the Manor was like a good angel to the poor, the ignorant, and the suffering around her. The appearance of the tall, slender figure, with its gentle, gliding dignity of movement, and the drooped face, so sweet and pale and thoughtful, was a signal of help and consolation to many an aching heart in the village and about the country where she lived.

Thus it was one day early in January, such a day as comes sometimes in mid-winter like a thought of childhood to an old man; telling wondrous tidings of the far-away spring that is—though we see it not,—and that will surely come to us again. It was evening, and the sun was near to his setting: great purple clouds hung about him, and fragments of them, as of a rent robe, were scattered over the clear sky. The wide landscape seemed to tremble in the amber light that was shed across it from the west; the leafless branches of the trees were traced intensely black against the golden horizon, while groves of dark and heavy-foliaged firs opposed their rounded masses of shadow to the lustrous heaven, and would not draw in any of the radiance with which the world was overflowing.

Nestling among the abrupt hills and wild breaks of moorland, lay the park and manor-house where Rosamond Bellew lived. The greensward sloped to a broad stream that flowed through the domain; beyond it rose woods, purpling in the distance. Crowning the hill, nearer, was a grove of pines, tall, column-like, and with a “whushing” music, as of distant waves, ever murmuring about their crests. Great trees stood grandly about the park—benign oak, and lofty beech, cedars, with a mystery in their low-spreading branches, and their eternal depth of shade. Joyous with aerial beauty the birches looked, grouped on a slope near the grey old mansion, like girls who longed but were ashamed to run. They were divided by an invisible fence from the dainty garden underneath the windows of the lady’s special sitting-room. Behind these birches the radiance of the sunset grew and faded every evening now, and Rosamond always stood at her window to watch it.

She stood there now—a tall, grey-clad woman; no longer

young, either in face, in figure, or in movement; but fair still, and gracious to behold, with a look which had in it some kinship to the clear, cold, and pure serenity of the winter evening. So she stood, her hands clasped lightly together, shining white upon the dusky, cloud-like folds of her robe, watching the sunset, and thinking—thinking—thinking.

Not forty miles from that quiet English valley flows the sea, and its waves break stormily outside the harbour into which the ships come, many in a day, from every part of the world, bringing hundreds home. Who shall say that it is a miserable world, when one day can hold so much of happiness as those simple words express—*coming home*?

There is one ship just coming in, and the passengers crowd on the after-deck; some already straining their eyes to catch the first sight of a beloved familiar face on the shore; some lounging carelessly, too used to wanderings to feel much of the sacred joy of return; some curiously gazing about them, new to the scene, and their perceptions keenly aroused to every thing around. But one or two stand apart, with eyes that look outward, but see inwardly, and thoughts that are trembling, deep, deep down underneath the outside unrippled calm of aspect—thoughts that none may guess at, and only One knows are there.

The erect figure of a man stands out a little aloof from the rest. He is watching the sun sink below an English horizon—watching the soft clouds hovering over an English landscape. His dark hair—you may see silver streaks in it, though he is not old—is tossed by the wind about his brow and over his face. He loves to feel it—to recognise the old familiar breath on his cheek; for it is part of the home he had lost so long, but now has found again. Ten years he has been a stranger in a strange land, but now—he is coming home.

You who have never left it, never know rapture like the heart-leap to those words. Your eyes do not see the glorified beauty which his drink in with every common sight, so long unseen till now. The cries of the sailors among the rigging of the many ships around—the familiar shouts on shore—the clanging of bells, the simplest, most accustomed sounds, come

on his ears with a very anguish of remembrance. He had never forgotten them. But between the two verges of remembrance and oblivion dwells the actuality which is beyond and above both, in which there is no degree—it *is*—complete, and full, and satisfying.

Our traveller stood so silent and enrapt, that a fellow-passenger addressed him twice before he heard. But then he turned round, neither vexedly nor impatiently.

“Yes; it is a lovely evening for our landing,” he said, smiling.

“May I ask,” for these two had been companions during the long voyage, and one, at least, was much interested in the other, “do you go direct to your own home to-night?”

“No. I have no abode in England. It is a wide home that I am coming to. But—it *is* home.”

“Let us then stay at the same inn to-night.”

“Many thanks; but I am going on farther at once. I start immediately on landing.”

He smiled again,—a courteous genial smile to his companion; a very strange, wistful, half-eager, half-restrained smile to himself. Involuntarily his eyes seemed to seek the sunset again. Glowing, golden, ambient, shone the sky, and the water in which it was reflected. Far away, on shore, he could see woods and fields and rising hills. Perhaps even, dimly, he could catch the cloudy outline of one of those hills behind which Rosamond Bellew was even then watching the last rays fading behind the birch-trees, and thinking—thinking.

And perhaps it may be that thought can leap to thought more quickly—more surely, than glance responds to glance, or word to word. Who can tell?

But thus it was that Leonard Ross came home.

THE END.

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while made me turn from Mary—thinking of the love for her which had shone out of Geoffrey's dying eyes. I re-assured the timid, clinging little creature, whose whole life was wound up in the grand necessity of loving and being loved—and I folded her to my breast, saying:—

“Be happy, my innocent child!” while to myself I said in a solemn contentment—“My duty is fulfilled; there is no further need of me, and I may go.” And I pray forgiveness for the selfish thought that sometimes stirs unbidden in my mind, as I lie quietly apart, while Mary and her lover are talking low together—the thought that, in the home to which I draw nigh, when we shall all meet, we who have loved one another upon earth, Mary will be surrounded by her husband and her children, but I—I, with outstretched arms may greet my Geoffrey, crying:—

“I alone have loved thee always!”

## AN ORDEAL.

IN SEVEN CHAPTERS. CHAPTER THE FIRST.

THE fire burnt cheerily, throwing a ruddy light over the walls of the little room, with its one or two prints in simple frames, its hanging bookshelf, and its ebony clock. The round table was drawn close to the fire, and on it the tea-things glistened, and the lamp stood ready for lighting. Agnes Ross sat with her feet on the fender, knitting by firelight, expecting, not waiting—he was always too punctual for that—to hear her brother's step outside, and the familiar click of his key in the street door, as he let himself in. It was a London lodging, in one of those quiet streets that appear like the very strongholds of dreariness and discomfort; but, for all that, it was a home, and looked like a home, too, to the orphaned brother and sister.

That was his step! Agnes rose quickly, set on the kettle, and lit the lamp. Then, with an air of careful pride, she took from the mantelshelf a glass jar in which was a bouquet of glowing, beautiful, greenhouse flowers, rich with aromatic fragrance. It seemed strange on the table where she placed it, surrounded by the homely ware of the tea-service. The bunch of winter violets, which she removed to make room for the others, had been far more appropriate. But Agnes' face shone as she looked on her floral treasures, and then watched for her brother's expression as he saw them.

He did see them, as he came into the room. He paused—then shut the door—then smiled back in answer to his sister's delighted glance.

“Yes, Leonard. What do you think of this?”

She held them up, glass jar and all, for admiration. “Where do you think these came from?”

The young man did not answer at first. He took the flowers from her hand, looked at them, breathed in their fragrance for a minute, then put them down again. The flush of pleasure soon passed from his thoughtful face. He sat down, looking even grave.

"Who do you think brought them?" persisted Agnes, changing the form of question.

"I can guess," he answered. A very brief pause; then he added, "Miss Bellew has been to see you." She said she would. How do you like her?"

"Very, very much," cried Agnes, enthusiastically. "How beautiful she is, Leonard. You told me she was, but you did not say half enough. And so gentle, and kind, and sweet. I fancied she was proud."

"So she is," Leonard said quickly; "but with a pride too lofty to show itself to those below her in wealth and position." He moved to take from his sister's hands the kettle she was lifting. Tea-making engrossed her attention for a little while, but she soon returned to the former theme.

"She sat and talked—pleasant, friendly chat—for nearly an hour. I showed her my drawings, and yours, afterwards. She praised mine very much, but I think she would not venture to praise yours. I showed her our old house and the views all about, that you took."

"Little simpleton! To suppose every one as interested in the dear old place as ourselves."

"I am sure she was interested, Leonard. Of course, not as we are, but still very much. Is it likely she would not be, knowing you? Then I showed her your German drawings. She found out for herself that Swiss view hanging by the window, and liked it. Generally, I hate to hear people praise your drawings or yourself, even. But I would allow Miss Bellew to praise both."

"Gracious permission! Now, terrible autocrat, give me my tea. It is the bleakest of November nights, outside. In this cosy little nest we feel nothing of it. Cosy little nest: dear little bird in the nest."

But in spite of his gay, loving tone, he seemed more than usually tired this evening. The dark hair fell carelessly, even rudely, over his forehead—the calm forehead that his

little sister was so proud of. She smoothed away the vagrant looks; her cool fingers were very sweet, welcome visitants to his hot brow.

"Does your head ache, Leonard?"

"A little."

"And I have been chattering away so thoughtlessly. Drink your tea, brother, and keep quiet. I will be as still as a mouse."

"No need, Agnes, I am only tired; that's all. It has been rather a busy day. Mr. Bellew had some involved accounts from a Dresden house, which I had to go through, because I know German. And — it was more fatiguing than reading Schiller."

"Yes, indeed!" Agnes said, seriously. She sat on her little chair; and, supporting her chin with her hand, gazed meditatively into the fire.

"But, for all that, it was pleasant enough," pursued Leonard, cheerfully—"pleasant to be able to render a special service to my master."

"Your master!" scornfully curled the red lip. But the pride of even a good woman often flies nearer the ground than that of a good man. Leonard smiled.

"Do not disown the word, nor the fact, my birdie. It is no shame to be a servant — or a servant I should not be."

Agnes broke forth anew with earnestness, even to tears.

"O Leonard! Don't be angry; I mean, don't be vexed with me for feeling—feeling it so hard that I should be the cause of all."

"The cause of all? Of what?"

"Of your being in this position. If it had not been for me, you would have gone to India, as our uncle wished; and you would have made your fortune, and come back to England while you were young; and you would have married, and been happy."

She stopped at length her rapid, passionate utterance. Leonard then spoke gently.

"Happy! My little sister, what is it that you call happiness?"

"Oh, I know—I know, with *you* duty is always happiness."

"Not always; not often, I am afraid, to this restless, erring humanity which is so strong within all of us. But, Agnes, there was no war between duty and inclination in my case. If it had not been simply right to stay at home, and be a brother otherwise than in name to my sister, I might have done it from pure selfishness. Next spring, you know, when I lose my little sister, I may yet go to India."

"O Leonard!"

"O Agnes!" He laughed at her, with the pleasant laugh of one who loves too truly to be less than tender over the foibles of the beloved. "All this time, while you are eloquent and unreasonable, my tea is getting cold, and so is yours."

Agnes turned slowly round to the tea-table. Her face, in its intent thoughtfulness, looked like her brother's for the time, though she was a youthful-hearted woman of four-and-twenty, and he a man of thirty; old-looking for his years.

"But, for all that"—she again plunged into the forbidden subject—"I am not convinced, brother."

"Not convinced of what?"

"That you would not have been happier, making your way abroad. It was such a prospect!"

"Spoken like a man of business. But life has other phases than commerce. I was never meant to be a homeless seeker for fortune. I crave more nourishment for heart and mind. As for riches and luxury, I want none of them. I never used to wish for them: I never will!"

His tone grew determined. Agnes looked up surprised, but more persuaded.

"And you are really happy here, and thus?"

"Happier than I could be anywhere else in the wide world," he answered, with a fervour that sent the colour to his cheek, the light to his eyes. His sister looked up into his face, and was satisfied.

The table cleared, Agnes was soon at work. But before Leonard unclosed Shakespeare to finish the *Tempest*, commenced the previous evening, the girlish, busy tongue began again on the fruitful theme with which their evening talk had commenced.

"Brother, Miss Bellew invited me to go and see her."

"Did she? Very naturally."

"What sort of a house is it?"

"Their villa is a perfect palace of taste and luxury. You were never in such a grand house in your life, Agnes. Mr. Bellew is one of our merchant princes, you know. He likes magnificence, and his house——."

"It is about Mr. Bellew I want to know, not his house. Is he a nice man?"

"*Nice* is such a young lady's word, I am afraid of venturing in its way. He is a handsome old man, to begin with. His face expresses the qualities I have always found in him—honour, integrity, straightforward truthfulness, perseverance, pride, and inflexible, inexorable will."

"I know what he is like, very well. Is Miss Bellew an only child?"

"She has a brother, a boy of fourteen; and two little sisters, born when her mother died."

"And she is a mother to them?"

"Almost," said Leonard, temperately. "She is very good—very loving and tender over them. Her mother left them in her charge. She fulfils it sacredly."

"And they all love her dearly?"

"I believe so: the little girls do, at least. Master Alfred is, I should think, rather difficult to deal with. His father has spoiled him ever since he was born."

"And neglects—or at least, thinks little of his daughters?"

"Not so fast. Rosamond, Miss Bellew, is the very apple of her father's eye."

"Is she?" said Agnes, thoughtfully.

Leonard opened his book, and began turning over the pages.

"And her name is Rosamond," she pursued, still musing, her work lying idle in her lap. "*Rosa mundi*, Rose of the world."

"Even so," said Leonard, gently, "*Rose of the world*." He repeated the words softly, dreamily, as he turned over more pages, and finally settled his volume and himself for reading. Then his voice became cadenced to a clear and equable music, as he began:—

"There be some sports are painful; but their labour  
Delight in them sets off."



## CHAPTER THE SECOND.

A WEEK afterwards, Agnes went to spend the day with Miss Bellew. It was looked forward to, thought about, counted upon. It proved one of those rare occasions when the anticipated pleasure falls even short of its reality. At least, so Agnes thought; when, after a long day that had seemed short, of talk and music, books and work, she and Miss Bellew and the children sat at evening in the drawing-room, with Mr. Bellew asleep in his arm-chair. The two little girls were at their sister's feet, absorbed in a fairy tale. Master Alfred was equally well amused by some boyish piece of science which his father had brought him that evening. Rosamond and Agnes sat side by side on the sofa. The night was bleak; rain falling, and gusts of wind sobbing, which reached their ears even in their curtained and cushioned splendour of ease.

"My brother will be here soon," said Agnes.

"Yes. It is a wild night for him to come so far."

"Oh! he does not mind wild weather. He even likes it. At home, he often used to go out in the midst of storm and wind, to help the fishermen draw up their boats on the shore. Once he went out in a little boat to save the people out of a wreck."

"Did he?"

A silence. Curiously enough, this theme of Leonard was a new one between the two girls, although to one of them at least, of ever-present interest.

"You must have loved your home very much," said Miss Bellew, presently.

"We did—especially Leonard. He looked as I never saw him look before nor since, when we drove away from the gate of our house, and through the village. It was such a happy home. Perhaps, one day we may yet have it again."

"You and your brother?"

"Yes; or Leonard, at least. I know he hopes for it, thinks of it, determines——."

But here Agnes stopped, suddenly conscious how unwittingly confidential she had become with her new friend.

She looked up, and Rosamond's eyes met her own. Miss Bellew's was a face that looked too proud for a woman's, until she smiled or spoke; then the curves of her mouth relaxed into a graciousness that made her whole countenance radiant and beautiful. Now the face was softened into absolute sweetness. Agnes thought it so lovely at that moment, she could not choose but look at it; she could not choose but feel it familiar, and her confidence no longer seemed unnatural. Nevertheless, she paused.

"You are not afraid of talking to me?" said Rosamond, simply. "Tell me more of your old home. I know you must like to talk of it, and I like to listen."

And so Agnes went on talking, and Rosamond listened.

It was natural that the sister should insensibly slide back to the subject of her brother. Agnes found herself telling Miss Bellew of all the circumstances of their position. True, none needed to be kept secret, and most of them Rosamond might already have learned from her father. Perhaps she had. However that might be, she kept very still, while Agnes told her how the failure of a bank soon after their father's death had ruined them, and how at first Leonard had tried to support his mother and sister in their old home by teaching in the neighbourhood.

"But our mother died; and, soon after, an old friend of my father's offered Leonard employment in translating, if he would come and live in London. So we left the old place, and went to live in London lodgings."

"It must have been a sad change."

"In many respects it was. And then our rich uncle Fellows wrote to offer Leonard a share in some great Indian concern of his. He had been unfriendly with the family for years, but now he wrote. And when Leonard declined, he sent back an angry letter, renouncing all connection with him for ever."

"Your brother declined?"

"Yes. Shall I tell you why? You guess—he would not leave me. We two were alone in the world then. I feel ungrateful sometimes."

She paused, blushing.

"Perhaps, when I am married, Leonard may go——."

"To India?"

"Yes. I often fancy he thinks of it. If it had not been for me, he might have made his fortune there by this time. His useless, troublesome sister, who now, after all, will leave him!" sighed Agnes, with a pensive look in her brown eyes.

"You are to be married, then? Soon?"

"In the spring, when his ship is expected home. He is a sailor," added she, with a girlish flush and a rapid glance at her companion.

"Is he? And will he have to go to sea again after you are married—to leave you?"

"No, indeed. I shall go with him, wherever he goes. No need—no right—no reason that I should ever leave him when I am his wife!" cried Agnes. "That is the happiness!"

Again she paused, with a bright blush. Again Rosamond's eyes perused her face with a kind of tender exultation in what she read there. Her lips parted, as if to speak, but she checked the impulse, and sat mute; her head a little drooped, her hands lightly clasped upon her lap—musing, most likely.

Leonard's eyes first fell on that fair picture as he entered the room; for the door opened noiselessly—as all doors were educated to do in that house—and he stood before them before they were aware. Both the girls started: both blushed. Agnes smiled gladly on seeing her brother. Rosamond moved away to awaken her father.

Mr. Bellew became conversational. The children were summoned to bed, and tea-time arrived.

Rosamond presided over the tea-table. It was pleasant to see her at its duties, all the surrounding appointments being, after their several ways, in graceful, delicate, and refined harmony with herself. She said little, even to Agnes, who sat by her side. She appeared entirely intent on the office before her: only an occasional lighting up of the dark eyes, a radiant flow of colour to the transparent cheek, betrayed that she listened to the animated discourse between the two gentlemen. Mr. Bellew liked talking with his clerk; he was too clever himself not to value intellect in another; and it was not the first agreeable evening he had

owed to the society of Leonard Ross. The old gentleman was intelligent, cultivated, in a certain sense, and sagacious. All his most genial characteristics came out on such occasions. He paid studious little courtesies to Agnes; he was kind, and friendly beyond kindness, to Leonard. As he leaned back in his velvet chair, his fine head with its white hair, his clear blue eyes, his well-cut features, made a pleasant picture of flourishing old age. All the harsher points were lost, which sometimes made his hale countenance stern and hard of aspect, even to cruelty.

Agnes had thought of him even with affection; and of Rosamond her appreciation had been warm even to enthusiasm. "Had been," for things were changing now, and the joy of the time seemed slipping away from Leonard's sister. The graceful luxury of the surroundings satisfied her taste; attracted her fancy, as before. Rosamond sat fair and brilliant, like a star shining in the midst of a cloud, or a diamond set in snow—as Agnes had been thinking to herself. Leonard was there, too. All was warmth: glowing, generous, cordial warmth. Yet Agnes felt chilled, and was no longer at peace.

The evening went by, and the time of departure drew near. Rosamond took Agnes to her room. That exquisite little dressing-room had delighted Agnes a few hours before. The rose-pink hangings; the mirrors with their marble consoles; the statuettes, and pictures, and flowers, and porcelain; the birds in their cages; the jewels and trinkets; the rare and costly trifles tossed lavishly about—all this had pleased simple Agnes to see. Now, she marked the incongruity of her own homely bonnet and cloak as they lay on the embroidered couch. Also, for the first time, she noted the contrast between herself and her hostess as they were both reflected in one of the long glasses.

Rosamond took her hand.

"Let us be friends," she said, with a certain hesitating timidity, very unusual to Miss Bellew.

A little while before, Agnes would have responded warmly, lovingly. Now, instinctively she shrank back. But her next impulse forbade her to risk the chance of giving pain.

"I hope so," she answered with gentleness.

Rosamond kissed her, and she returned the kiss.

Down the soft-carpeted staircase into the chastened glow of the drawing-room again, with its purple and its gold, and its grandeur that was lost in the refinement and grace that reigned over all. Good night to the courtly, white-haired gentleman who stood by the hearth; good night to the queen of the palace—the fairy of the enchanted castle—the lily of the beautiful garden. Rosamond looked like all these as she gave her hand, first to Agnes, then to Leonard. He touched it; glanced, not looked, into her face, and turned to answer some casual inquiry of Mr. Bellew. The bell rang, the servant waited; the brother and sister descended the staircase. At its foot they were arrested by Rosamond's voice.

"Stay, Miss Ross! Agnes! you have forgotten your flowers."

She came flying down to them, holding the beautiful camellias and geraniums clasped to her breast. Leonard stood nearest to her; and, before his will could rise to control it, his impulse—passionate, imperious, overwhelming—had commanded him to stretch out his hand. He took the flowers. He looked at her; and, for a single instant, she looked at him.

There was no second good night. Agnes twined her arm within her brother's. They were out in the cold, blank, silent night.

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### CHAPTER THE THIRD.

THE brother and sister walked rapidly. The rain had ceased, but a damp mist hung over everything. The houses looked like great, gaunt shadows; the street-lamps flared with a sickly, lurid light; the park they had to cross was a dreary wilderness, haunted with strange shapes; for tree and gate and fence looked ghostly in the vaporous air. Agnes shivered: her brother drew her closer to his side.

"Are you cold?" he asked anxiously. They were the first words he had spoken since they left the house.



"No ; not cold."

A pause.

"You have had a pleasant day?"

"It was very pleasant."

Another silence.

"How sweet these flowers are!"

Agnes caught them from his hand.

"I should like to throw them away!" she said, passionately.

Leonard gently reclaimed them, saying nothing. He did not inquire the reason of his sister's sudden emotion, although it had left her trembling; and, once or twice, a brief, strong sob escaped from her. He said nothing.

The narrow, dismal street was reached at last. They re-entered their home. The fire shone with a subdued glow; two or three books lay on the table, Agnes' work-basket, and the glass of flowers. Leonard lit the lamp, made his sister sit on the little sofa, and took up a letter which had arrived in their absence. But he only handled it mechanically; looked at it with eyes whose vision seemed introverted. A strange expression was on his face; such as even his sister had never seen there before. It was not the look she had expected—had dreaded to see. That she could have interpreted; but this was in a language of which she held no key. He took up the glowing flowers he had brought with him, he regarded them long with deep, thoughtful eyes. Agnes sprang to him.

"Oh! put them away—put them away!"

He looked into her face. Her pleading, anguished look forced down the calm front with which he strove to meet it. So he only took her in his arms, and gently pressed her head against his shoulder, blinding the entreating eyes that saw too much. Presently, in a quiet voice, he said,—

"Yes, Agnes. I will put them away."

In a changed tone, presently, he added:—

"You are tired, and it is late. We will not sit up longer."

"O brother, brother! you are cruel to me."

"Am I? Do I pain you—have I pained you, my poor birdie?"

"Is it no pain to see you suffering; to know you miserable; and to be told no more?" she cried with the vehemence of her quick, impatient nature.



He did not answer.

"I thought I knew my brother's heart," she went on, "even as he knew mine. But I was wrong—wrong. From the time we were little children I thought we had shared every trouble, every difficulty, every trial. I was proud, glad to think it. But you have been in sorrow and I never knew; you are unhappy now, and you try to put me off with vague words."

"Agnes! You are not right in this reproach. The confidence you claim *ought* not to have been yours. Simple honesty would have held me dumb, if other feelings had been insufficient. I had no right to indulge in the luxury of sympathy. I will not have it now. I do not need it. Miserable I have not been: for I have done no wrong,"—he pushed her gently from him—his colour rose, his voice took a new tone,—"*although I love her! I love her!*" he said, "with all my strength; with all the yearning of my soul; although I am the one who loves her and will love her truest—deepest—*best!* Ay—the *best*. Though all the world love her too, no other love will she ever have like mine!"

He stopped abruptly, seated himself, and shaded his face with his hand.

"You have heard," he said, almost sternly; "you have your wish now. You know your brother's heart. If I hid it from you before, it was not from shame. I am not ashamed of loving Rosamond Bellew. I will carry my love for her, with my hope of heaven, to the grave pure and spotless, God helping me. And the life He gave me shall not be less worthy even if it be less happy, because of the love."

"Oh, brother, brother!" Agnes sobbed, clinging round his neck, "I cannot bear it, I, that am so happy, to see you suffer."

"My child, I know it is hard," he said, tenderly; "God bless you for the love that makes it so."

"Every day, every time you see her, that you go there——."

"I know. Therefore, when my little bird leaves me for her own happy nest, next spring, I shall go."

"Where?"

"Abroad somewhere. I shall easily settle where. In the

meantime, I shall not go there again." His glance unconsciously caught the flowers that lay near him for a single instant. He rose resolutely.

"Now, remember, no word henceforward." He kissed her fondly, then led her gently, but irresistibly, to the door.

"You must go to bed now. Good night, sister."

"Good night, brother." But she lingered yet a few minutes,—then she went.

Left alone, Leonard Ross stood beside the fireplace, leaning his head against the high mantelpiece. His hands clasped themselves together very tightly; the one instinctive, unconscious demonstration of rending pain.

It was a new pain, and one so mingled with sweetness, that it defied him to put it away. For a brief space he had tasted of a joy most exquisite;—for once at least, his life had risen to full tide, and joy had crowned it with a crest of light. There is no man who loves, and sees for the first time, the answering electric look, which at a flash shows him a new world radiant and glorious, into which he alone may enter; over which he alone holds sovereignty—there is no man, beholding this, but would feel the rapture of the new joy. Leonard had tasted of the ecstasy: now came the recoil. The gate of the dream-land had closed upon him, and he stood in the cold, grey, outside world again.

In that grey reality, truths now made themselves harshly felt. That he was not alone in this love; that it was requited; soon ceased to be a thought of sweetness: it aggravated to torture, it lashed even to fierceness. For the first time the cry of his soul was, "It is more than I can bear."

Such strife, such struggle, it is for no earthly hand to record. Let no man be ashamed if, in his calmer latter days, he look back to some such episode in his early life. Over it, be sure, angel eyes have watched, with divine compassion for the suffering, divine exultation in the victory.

In the morning Agnes came down, with looks well tutored into cheerfulness. Her brother stood by the window, an open letter in his hand. He was very pale, she thought to herself. He kissed her as usual, then held her hand, still.

"Agnes," said he, in a low voice, "I have only just now opened this letter."

"It was here last night. Oh, Leonard, no bad news?"

"Uncle Fellowes is dead."

"Dead—Uncle Fellowes!" A sudden flash of thought made her heart beat quickly, almost to suffocation. She looked up in her brother's face. He spoke:—

"There is no will, and I am the heir at law."

#### CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

A FORTNIGHT had gone by. What a new-hued time was this! What a wondrous world revolved within the circle of the old one. New life—new air—new warmth, light and lustre. Although the days were shortening towards the year's end, and sullen clouds hid constantly the vault of heaven, and sunshine came not through, and earth grew cold in the shadow.

Leonard Ross was betrothed to Rosamond Bellew. Her father was surprised, at first:—acute perceptions do not always accompany a shrewd intellect, and the merchant might have gone on not seeing that which was before his eyes, to the end of his days. He was surprised, and at first, scarcely pleased, perhaps. His clerk suddenly transformed into a millionaire was an idea that he could not at once get accustomed to. That the millionaire should become his son-in-law was more easy of acceptance. Still it was all very strange. He was confounded, too, by his daughter's frank, almost proud, avowal of her love for Leonard. Of course, no objections could be urged; he gave his consent. But it was some time before he grew easy under the new state of things. It was curious, puzzling, perplexing, he thought, that Leonard Ross should be a rich man—able to marry his daughter.

To Rosamond and Leonard it never seemed strange or new. They were very happy. That golden fortnight held for them riches enough to dower many a long life. Existence is more

evenly balanced than we think. Perhaps we all drink nectar sometimes; only to some it comes drop by drop, sweetening the daily draught; while others quaff it from the full goblet in one draught, and live, thereafter, on the remembered glory.

At the fortnight's end Leonard was to go down to Blishford, the large town near which his property lay, and where his uncle had died, to take possession of the estate, and to arrange various legal matters in connection, not only with it, but with his approaching marriage. Two weddings would take place early in the spring. Agnes was to be claimed by her sailor lover, who would then return from the West Indies, and Rosamond and Leonard were to be married at the same time. The fond dream of many, many years was to be realised; and the birthplace of Leonard was to be the dear home to which he would take his bride. He described it to her, again and again, and sketched faithful vignettes of well-remembered places on stray scraps of paper, all of which she kept and treasured as the costliest works of art. She listened, never tired—asking question upon question with the persistency of an interest that could never be exhausted, for it arose out of a depth of tenderness that could never be fathomed.

But—at the fortnight's end, Leonard was to go. The time came, and he went. Only for a week—a week would suffice for everything, and he was to be back at Christmas-time. It was scarcely like a parting Rosamond said; although her lip quivered like a grieved child's, and her eyes shone through large tears she tried hard to conceal.

Nevertheless, whether at first or at last, separation brings with it the inevitable penalty of suffering. To those who love, and specially to those whose love is yet new in time, there must always seem something cruel and unnatural in this *separation*. Love shrieks out against it, and will not be constrained into submission. So Rosamond ran into her little fairy bower, and could not be won thence, even by Agnes; who, it had been planned, was to stay with her during Leonard's absence, and who would fain have soothed the passionate grief away.

Meanwhile Leonard pursued his journey; thoughts, memo-

ries, and hopes, thronging his brain; new feelings and old, stirring at his heart. Verily there can be few things

“Sweeter than the dream  
Dream’d by a happy man.”

Great resolves mixed themselves with those happy hopes; ardent yearnings for the future, yearnings in which self was the beginning but not the end of aspiration.

So he went on his way—through the long railway journey, to the great, looming, London-like town near which was his destination. Business, now, grows thick upon him—we may leave him for awhile.

We may leave him sitting in the old oak-panelled parlour, with its quaint furniture, its massive chairs and tables, and carved bureau; the room that had been his uncle’s study, and where, as the grave housekeeper informs him, her master transacted all his business. Large and various must that business have been. The management of the huge property, which chiefly consisted of houses in Blishford, was only part of it. He still kept up his connection with the merchant’s house in Calcutta wherein he had originally made his fortune; he had large speculations afloat, grand schemes, even at the very time of his death—when paralysis cut short in one instant all the old man’s hopes and ambitions for ever. Leonard, during the days he passed in that old house, thought often with much marvelling as to the manner of man his unknown uncle had been. He asked many questions of the demure housekeeper.

“He was a hard gentleman, sir, though I say it. Many a time, in the bad winters, with fever about, and half Blishford a’most driven to famine, he’s been begged of for money to help the poor; and he, out of all his wealth, would never give a fraction. And his poor tenants in some o’ them miserable courts and places—where a body hardly likes to go, they’re so foul and wretched—if in the worst of times they were backward with their rent, it fared sorely with them.”

Leonard heard and mused within himself, gravely and sadly, for a long time, as he pursued his task of examining the papers, letters, deeds and memoranda, which had been



kept for the heir's arrival, with the lawyer's seal affixed upon the locks of the drawers which held them.

So, in the old oak-panelled parlour, with the bronze lamp shedding a flickering light on the carved bureau, and the thoughtful face bent over it:—with the firelight glowing in the wide grate, and the polished walls shining with a dark resplendence,—we leave him until to-morrow.

#### CHAPTER THE FIFTH.

A WINTRY night in the outskirts of London, snow on the ground; deep already, and deepening at every moment. The air is thick with large flakes that fall noiseless on road and pavement, on house roof and church steeple, on pillared porch and garden wall. It was bitterly cold. The snow that had fallen was not soft, but frozen into a cruel hardness. Footsteps left hardly any imprint in it, and the track of wheels and horses' hoofs that the day's traffic had left had been long since effaced, and no new vehicles came down the quiet district to renew them. Houses, houses, houses on all sides, but jealously closed: only a hall lamp shining at rare intervals through a fanlight. No cheerful glow came through crimson curtains, a generous contingent from some warm cosy nest to the bleak, bare, outside night. All without is silent, blank, chill. What is it *within* one of these "handsome houses, where the wealthy" City men and merchants dwell? For this is a suburb of "first-class villa residences."

Through the blinding snow—through the relentless biting cold, a gentleman who, having newly emerged from a neighbouring omnibus, afforded a black relief to the unmitigated pallor of surrounding things, dashed on, very quickly and determinedly. His colour was fast changing, however, first to iron grey, then to pepper and salt, and finally to salt by itself. He reached his destination, rang at the bell, as he entered by a wide gate into what under its white masquerade dress, seemed to be a garden and shrubberies: then sprang up some steps, knocked loudly at a door whose massive oak



and awful knobs even the snow had respected, and shook himself free from the cloudy flakes that covered him. One more look out into the forbidding night; one more instinctive shiver and shrinking from the rude gust that came, with snow for its ally, right in his face. Then the door flew open and he stepped in. The massive portal closed behind him. Where was the harsh night gone? What had become of the incarnate dreariness? the black vault above; the lurid desolation of the world below?

Here was a wide hall, well lit by two swinging lamps of painted glass, that looked like ripe summer fruits hanging from a garden wall; pictures rich and warm in colour; and one or two statues. A fair white Welcome stood on one side, holding out her hands and smiling with her lip, her eyes, her brow, with every curve of her gracious face and figure; and a Peace, not needing to smile, her look was so serene, with her arms folded purely over the book she held to her breast, and her olive-wreath changed for one of Christmas holly, red-berried, shining-leaved, that another hand than the sculptor's had placed there. Evergreens decked the walls, the picture frames, the lamps;—and the fragrance of bay-leaves scented the warm air. The newly-arrived guest looked round; as if with dazzled eyes, he passed his hand across his brow,—while the servant relieved him of his hat and his cloak. And now, sound begins to add itself to the other accompaniments of the scene: a warm, happy murmur of voices, through which, presently, a light, tremulous, girlish laugh is embroidered like a silver thread on crimson. And then some cunning hand evokes a passionate flood of sound from the pianoforte: it rises, it sinks, and swells, and rises again, and falls in tiny crystal droplets, and then ceases. For the dining-room door has been opened, and our sometime wayfarer in the snow has entered.

A large room, glowing warmly with crimson, and opening into a smaller one, beyond which again, the faint light of a pendent lamp, reveals a tiny conservatory. They are seated round the blazing fire in the first room, all but the one who stands by the piano—her white fingers yet poised over the ivory keys. A hale, handsome old man, two little girls nestling on the hearthrug, very fairy princesses of blue eyes,

golden hair, and dainty apparel ; an older boy poring over a book, and bright-faced Agnes Ross, her look alert and flashing, her whole countenance radiant and happy, seated on the sofa, the other place on which has been just vacated by Rosamond.

Oh, happiest Rosamond ! She looked up and saw the figure standing in the doorway.

" Leonard ! Oh, I knew it was you."

They gathered round him : his sister, with a fond embrace ; the children, in much demonstrative glee ; even slow-moving Mr. Bellew rose from his chair, and met him with outstretched hand.

" The train was late," Leonard observed, as he seated himself. " Delayed one hour by the great snows." Agnes had made him take her place. He sat beside Rosamond on the sofa, and then his sister attacked him volubly with inquiries as to how he had travelled ? was he tired ? had he dined ? But the questions answered, he leaned back, glad to be silent, perhaps. The picture was complete. Laughing children, the sweep of soft rich drapery, the pearl-like light of lamps, the cordial sound of the flaming fire, and the sweet luscious odours that stole in from the neighbouring flowers : luxurious allurements and gratifications for the senses, refined and subtle as the tastes they wooed and won—all were here.

Leonard again passed his hand over his brow.

" Dearest, you are tired," whispered Rosamond, bending close to him in sweet, sudden anxiety. Her hand timidly touched his shoulder. He took it in his own, and looked at it ; the fair, soft, little hand, the delicate wrist well guarded by its outer sleeve of purple silk, and within that, drooping frills of finest lace, and a shining bracelet of gold thickly set with emeralds, clasped about it, and ever and anon slipping up the round arm. Fair little hand !

Leonard looked at it ; then at her sweet face, where a faint flush was gathering, and fading, and then glowing again, like sun-rays upon snow. Then he looked round the room, and finally his gaze rested full on the face of Mr. Bellew, his host, and future father-in-law. No sign of weariness in Leonard now. There was even more than usual energy and vigour in his face ; he raised his head, and sat erect, still holding the little hand

in his, still gazing at the old merchant's placid, well-favoured countenance.

"It is a bitter night, outside," Leonard said. "It will be a hard winter."

"Hard winter, truly!" observed Mr. Bellew. "My horses fell three times this morning. At last, I had to get out and walk a street's length to the counting-house. Have you had any adventures, Leonard?"

"Not of that kind," replied he, the faintest smile quivering at his mouth.

"No. But we look for something more stirring from you, who have been away ten days; in that romantic manufacturing district, too. How did you leave Blishford?"

"Cleaner than it had ever been in its life, I think, for the snow fell even faster than the dirt."

"All business satisfactorily settled?" Mr. Bellew asked, en passant.

"The business is settled."

"Come, come; you needn't blush, Rosamond!" said Mr. Bellew, who seemed genial even to jocularities on this occasion. "So much of the preliminaries over, then. Well—well—well. Miss Agnes, shall I give you this hand-screen?"

The old gentleman bent forward, always studiously polite to his fair guest. It was curious to watch his grave face relax into a smile of stately Grandisonian courtesy, while all the time the shrewd eyes shone, the inflexible mouth was firm and hard.

"Papa, papa!" cried one little fairy who tumbled round on the hearthrug—a tiny bundle of azure silk and lace—with a rosy face beaming up in eager inquiry. "Is it true, papa, is Rosamond to be married soon?"

"And will she go away?" chimed in the other, "and won't she be our very own, any more?"

Rosamond rose. She might be excused for seeking her work from a table in the inner room, pending the answer to these inquiries. But Leonard followed her—Leonard drew her yet further away—into the little conservatory, at one side of which Rosamond was accustomed to sit and read, or write, or work. Her little desk was there now; her chair stood beside it, and a white vase with a single crimson rose in it.

She took this last in her hand, and examined it with great attention.

"It is for you," she said, softly. "I have watched it budding day after day, and this very morning it opened. It knew you were coming, you see. I had taught it to know."

"Shall we sit here awhile?" said Leonard. "I like this place. It is pleasant to be here."

"And remomber," said she, "you have everything to tell me."

He started. She smiled up at him, in the very overflowing of contentment.

"Oh, I have so much to hear!" she went on gaily; "the history of ten days, the full, true, and particular history. You know it is of no use to attempt to satisfy me with less. So begin, do begin."

She sat down, and he took his place beside her. Such a serene, sweet face was drooped from his gaze, such quivering happiness played about the rosy mouth. There was a brief silence: they could hear the children's voices in the other room, and Agnes' vivacious tones clear above the rest.

"She is telling them a story," said Rosamond, "and I am going to hear my own special story—am I not?"

Leonard's voice, steadfast and sustained, vibrated on the murmur of distant sound with special distinctness.

"Yes, darling, you shall be told."

Something in the tone of his voice, an indefinite, indescribable something, smote Rosamond's quick sense. The shy happiness faded from her face; she looked up with a swift, appealing glance—a sort of helpless deprecation of ill.

"Leonard! what is it?"

"I will tell you all, my Rosamond. My Rosamond," he repeated fondly, with a quiet smile, that insensibly smoothed away, for the moment, the trouble in her face. He held her hand close, and began.

"You are to see me, then, going through that wonderful town, at once so rich and so squalid—so magnificent and so miserable, with its thousands upon thousands of inhabitants, mostly poor—many of them destitute—some even despairing. Through the dark, dismal streets, where all the falling snow was polluted by smoke and filth, and even through the frost

the air was heavy and impure. Past miserable dwellings—hovels, where people seemed festering, not living; where I saw gaunt figures moving about with wretched faces, ashen-hued—with glaring eyes, and sunken, hollow cheeks. I saw their hungry, fierce looks as they passed me by—these creatures that want, and disease, and ignorance together, seemed to have left scarcely human. Rosamond, my heart swelled as I saw them, and knew that the avarice and cold-heartedness of my uncle had helped to make them so. I thought that in the days to come, life should hold better things for them; that I would repair the injuries—right the injustice that he had done."

"Ah—your uncle's property was in those miserable streets?"

"Chiefly.—I planned great benefactions, I imagined gigantic schemes of improvement. In my mind I looked on the same places—and the people in them ten years hence. I thought how we would work together to help them—minds and bodies."

"And we will—we will!" cried Rosamond, with unconscious apprehension giving poignance to her tone.

"Ay, love.—if it please God." He stopped a little after those lowly-uttered words. Then he resumed.

"From thoughts, dreams, plans like these, I went back, to Woolthorpe, the old house where my uncle lived his latter years, and died. I went back, thinking of these poor souls' misery, which I was to alleviate through my great happiness. That was last night, darling. Last night, at this time, I was thinking to myself of this night's joy of return." He went on more rapidly. "And I set to work, tying up papers, arranging the deeds and parchments with which the old bureau was full, and which the lawyers and I had been busy over for many days. I had just finished; I was closing one of the small inner drawers, which slightly resisted the effort. I pressed it harder, and touched some secret spring, it seems, and a side-drawer sprang open."

"How strange!" said Rosamond, tremulously.

"A paper lay there, carefully folded, not very long since written. I saw my uncle's bold signature at the bottom of the page. I think I knew what it was before I opened it and